KSGU Volume 4

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in Volume 4

福井晴敏（ふくい・はるとし）

1968年、東京都墨田区生まれ。1998年に『Twelve Y.O.』で第44回江戸川乱歩賞を受賞し作家デビュー。『亡国のイージス』『終戦のローレライ』『Op.ローズダスト』など著書、映画化作品多数。現在、月刊ガンダムエース誌上にて本作『機動戦士ガンダムUC』を連載中。

COVER DESIGN
akihito sumiyoshi + fake graphics

Kadokawa Comics A

機動戦士ガンダムUC ユニコーン 4

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KCA 189-5
角川書店

9784047150607

1920979006409

ISBN978-4-04-715060-7
C0979 ¥640E

定価:本体640円(税別)
発行:角川書店

戦いに敗れたバナージは、《ユニコーン》ごとネオ・ジオンの拠点<パラオ>に連行される。
辺境の地で、銃を向け合った相手の人生に触れるバナージ。
その頃《ネェル・アーガマ》には《ユニコーン》を奪還すべく、単艦でのパラオ攻略の命が下されていた。
ハイパーメガ粒子砲の業火が宇宙を照らす時、史上かつてない奇襲作戦が敢行される。
人造ニュータイプ・マリーダとの戦いの果てに、バナージはなにを見るのか——。
ガンダムサーガ最新作、風雲急を告げる第4弾！

機動戦士ガンダムUC ユニコーン
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM UNICORN

©創通・サンライズ

機動戦士ガンダムUC ユニコーン

4 パラオ攻略戦

福井晴敏

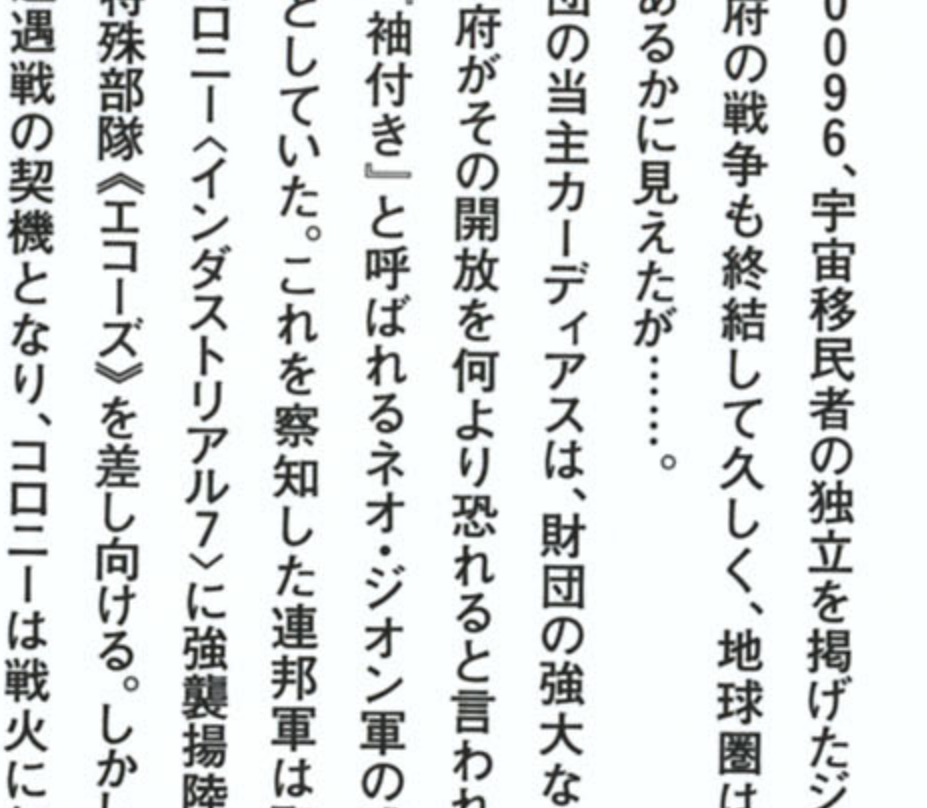
キャラクターデザイン 安彦良和　メカニックデザイン カトキハジメ　原案 矢立肇・富野由悠季　挿絵 虎哉孝征

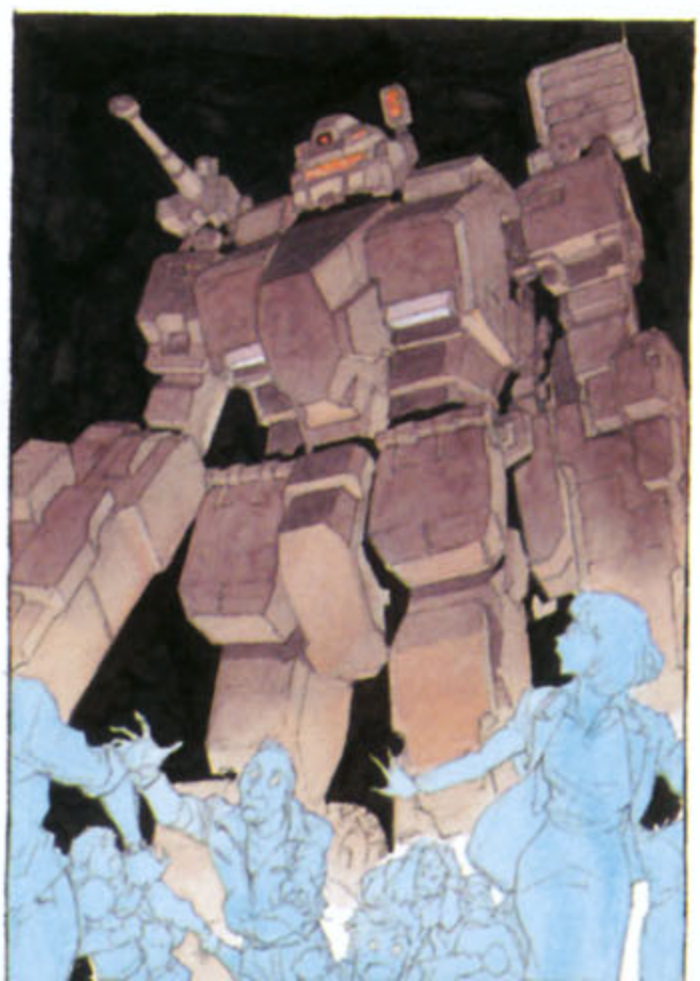
Previous to GUNDAM UC

前巻までのあらすじ

宇宙世紀0096、宇宙移民者の独立を掲げたジオン公国と、地球連邦政府の戦争も終結して久しく、地球圏はつかの間の平穏の中にあるかに見えたが……。

ビスト財団の当主カーディアスは、財団の強大な力の根源であり、連邦政府がその開放を何より恐れると言われる『ラプラスの箱』を、『袖付き』と呼ばれるネオ・ジオン軍の残党組織に引き渡そうとしていた。これを察知した連邦軍は取引の舞台となる工業コロニー〈インダストリアル7〉に強襲揚陸艦《ネェル・アーガマ》と特殊部隊《エコーズ》を差し向ける。しかしそれは『袖付き』との遭遇戦の契機となり、コロニーは戦火に包まれてし





まうのだった。

〈インダストリアル7〉に住む少年バナージ・リンクスは、『袖付き』の要人・オードリー・バーンとの出会いから事態に巻き込まれ、戦火の中で瀕死のカーディアスからMS《ユニコーン》を託される。自分が父親であることをバナージに明かし炎に包まれるカーディアス。バナージの昂ぶる感情は《ユニコーン》の力を目覚めさせ、《ネェル・アーガマ》の窮地を救った。

『ラプラスの箱』への道標とされる《ユニコーン》とバナージたちを収容した《ネェル・アーガマ》は暗礁宙域に逃れる。しかしこれを見逃す『袖付き』ではなかった。バナージは、ジオン公国の忘れ形見と判明したオードリーを守るため、再び《ユニコーン》で出撃。《ユニコーン》の力を発現させ善戦するも、『シャアの再来』と言われるフル・フロンタルの前についに敗れ、《ユニコーン》と共に『袖付き』の手に捕らわれてしまうのであった。

イラスト／安彦良和

Chapter 1

Part 1

"…What did you just say?"

At that moment, Alberto felt the entire world around him distort, and could not help but ask back. (You should have heard that clearly.) A cold voice rang through the speaker of the headphone.

(I don't know how they got in contact with each other, but Banagher Links is definitely Cardeas' son, the son he had with Anna Links after Ellen died.)

Martha Vist Carbine's steel-like face remained unmoved on the monitor that had static noise on it. *Banagher Links, that arrogant boy who boarded the RX-0 without understanding the significance and importance of the machine, who ended up bearing the burden of the Laplace Box…that's right. It was that Links. I definitely heard of this surname before, so why didn't I think of this possibility? Is it because I didn't want to admit it—* Alberto asked his dazed mind and got an answer, and was speechless again because of this shock. The sense of realism was lost from Martha on the monitor and the communication room console, and Alberto continued to feel that his body was distorted together with the world around him.

Is this a plan that was thought out? Or was it all completely unreasonable coincidence? Either way, Cardeas Vist did not just hand the Box over to a random boy who was passing by, but the fate of the family

to the child of the woman who could not become his succeeding wife—and also left aside the one person who originally had this right, the one who should inherit this.

(Pull yourself together. It doesn't matter who the "Unicorn" pilot is. The problem is that the machine is already in Neo Zeon's hands. That's a failure on your part, Alberto.)

The sharp voice reached his eardrums, dragging his wavering consciousness back in. Alberto grabbed the mic of the headphone and turned his stare of reliance towards Martha on the 15 inch monitor.

"Bu-but, that was the best option in that situation. Without the " Unicorn", we can protect the Box. I was thinking about letting the "Unicorn" get destroyed there…"

(Results justify everything. I told you before that people will never judge the means, right?)

It looked like it was a casual nudge forward, but in fact, it was a solid leash. Alberto saw that Martha was physiologically wounding him with her usual tone, and all his momentum was killed off. (I've already used up all means that could be used.) The Acting Leader of the Vist Foundation continued on, while all Alberto could do was to listen quietly.

(The Central Government in Dakar received the report about Mineva Zabi being imprisoned, and were panicking over it. Soon after, they'll be taking action. Just stay over there and see how things develop.)

"Yes…"

(This is a path of no return. You better amend the failure you made. You can do it.)

A path of no return. This line was stuck in Alberto's heart, causing him to look up, and at this moment, Martha disappeared. He saw his blurry face being reflected on the monitor screen, used his barely numb hand to take down the headphone, and slumped heavily onto the hard chair.

There was no one else in the second communication room located on the bridge block. The narrow and long room had a monitor and console for communications, and two chairs were lit by the reflected light of the power indicator. This facility was meant for unified communication to whichever squadron they belonged to during landing exercises and fleet operations, but the bridge's communication facilities itself would be enough for the Nahel Argama that would launch alone. This was a place where there would not be much problems for a civilian, who was coincidentally on board, to use as a public phone.

The line here was isolated from the one on the bridge, so there was no worry of the conversation being tapped. The ECOAS surveillance range had not extended here either as only the vague voices of the bridge broadcast could be heard in the room. (Highline Post, get ready to install) (Linking hull at the expected moment. No changes. At the designated time, the Emergency response group are to…) and more messages could be heard. Despite not knowing what they were about, it was most likely that they were preparing to repair the ship. It had been more than 5

hours since the Nahel Argama left the shoal space region to meet the resupply ship the Senate Council sent over, and they were in a situation where it could be said to be absolutely normal.

It had been a day and a half since Neo Zeon attacked and the RX-0, the key to the Box, had been taken away. It was unknown what Martha did, but the Senate Council that was hard to budge finally took action. Their mobile suit squad got wrecked, the Nahel Argama frame had taken obvious damage, but the order to retreat would never come if they took the resupply. The ship was used to carry out a secret mission—and also a ship that housed the heir to the Zabi family, and it would have to continue its journey where the front could not be seen. He had no privacy, could not shower as he wanted, and could not make a call to the psychologist counsellor who he often talked to. His days of being viewed as obstructive and butting heads with Daguza and the ECOAS would still have to continue. "Damn it!" Alberto groaned as he swept aside the headphone on the console.

That would be fine. The stench of the ship's paint and the unique odor of ozone had completely stained his body, and he had to endure that too. What was hard for him to endure was the fact that he was unable to sleep. *That man's* voice dragged his thoroughly fatigued body from sleep together with the air-conditioning and the gust from the motor.

A path of no return…when will I forget the feeling of squeezing that trigger? There was no other way. That man was the one who wanted to break the 100-year worth of order after all. That man left me alone when I 've always done the most appropriate thing, so why did he— Alberto clenched his stiff hands.

"Why…am I not the chosen one?"

He squeezed out the voice from deep within his throat, and his trembling body felt the weak gravity behind it. Alberto did not lift his face from the console until this surge of emotions subsided.

Part 2

The wall was covered with a soft mat used for self-mutilation prevention, and the ceiling had a surveillance camera installed. There were no windows, and the door had a peephole through the doorgrill. The scene for a prisoner detention room was the same for either Federation or Zeon. If there was a difference, it would be that the air-conditioning here would be quieter.

Amidst the silence, the sound of an electronic lock being unlocked was heard. Mineva Zabi sat on the hard mattress of the built-in bed and looked towards the opening door.

It's not mealtime yet…is it a new interrogator? As Mineva thought this way and got ready to get defensive, a familiar face appeared at the door. Mineva did not know what expression to make at this point as she kept her mouth shut. Riddhe Marcenas had his back facing the light from the corridor as he too stared at Mineva with a tense expression.

"Audrey Burne…no, I should be calling you Mineva Zabi, right ?"

Riddhe turned his hand to close the door behind him as he said with a somewhat gloomy voice. His eyes had icy cold anger in them. Mineva did not think that a pilot had a need to meet her, and she did not feel that the higher-ups would agree to this. She realized that this was not an official meeting, and clenched her trembling fists as hard as she could. Riddhe casted an unmoving stare on Mineva and said with a suppressed voice, "I often heard the Zabi family's speeches when I was young."

"Gihren Zabi was your uncle, am I right? When his younger brother Garma died on Earth, Zeon carried out a state funeral on its land. It was probably broadcasted throughout the world. About how they should not let Garma's death be put to waste, that only the citizens of Zeon who were inferior were the elites chosen by heaven, that speech where people kept chanting *Sieg Zeon Sieg Zeon*."

It had been the day before…no, it seemed that it was two days before since the time both of them snuck into the "Unicorn" hangar secretly and chatted about meaningless things like how she looked like some actress. Riddhe probably spent this time facing reality as he used a stiff expression to restrain the anger and sorrow he was tasting at this point as he walked towards Mineva in his grey officer uniform. Mineva held back the urge to move back as she looked right at Riddhe's face.

"*Sieg Zeon, Sieg Zeon*…thousands of spectators shouted just like that. It was really a vexing scene. I was just a brat back then, but I remembered that I had goosebumps. What's with everyone from children to old folks doing the same thing with indifference? Are

they robots? Can't they think for their own? Don't they think about what they feel?"

Closing in at a distance where their fingertips could touch each other, Riddhe clenched his fists hard, "SAY SOMETHING!" the rude voice caused the air in the narrow detention room to tremble slightly.

"Did Neo Zeon do that too? Making everyone shout Sieg Zeon or something that. Say it here then."

That expression of his was wavering, unlike the words he said. Riddhe took a short breath and looked away from Mineva's probing eyes, and yelled "SAY IT!" as he looked aside.

"Say Sieg Zeon. Let me know that you're the princess of Zeon. If not…"

The stuttering voice had a tinge of crying at the end, silently moisturizing the air in the room. *What is this person here? Why does he look so hurt* Mineva's chest had this tight feeling as she had this doubt, and she looked up at this young man's face. *Like me—this person may not be able to find a way to express his thoughts into words. He has so many things he wants to say, to confirm, but everything and anything became shallow before he could speak up.*

"…Never mind. So be it."

After a long moment of silence, Riddhe ruffled his blond hair and stared at Mineva with a hesitant look. "I heard that you've been keeping quiet about this. How someone with the identity of

Mineva Zabi could slip into a Federation ship like this…I think it's not something a pilot like me can ask. I'll leave the rest to the experts."

He said this to affirm himself—no, for himself to hear as he turned back. Mineva saw Riddhe back that felt like he was maturing, and heard him say, "But at least remember something." And lifted her chin.

"A guy once offered his life for a girl called Audrey Burne…that guy kept calling your name until the end. Not Mineva Zabi, Audrey."

Mineva's heart pumped for a moment as the face of the boy who ran alongside her in the alleys of the colony appeared in her mind. Riddhe glanced at her silent face as he quietly walked towards the door. *This man's thinking is too one-sided.* Mineva instinctively thought this way, but this was not enough to wipe away that inexplicable sense of guilt. Thus, she spoke up, "You really don't know anything at all."

Riddhe stopped his hand that was reaching for the door handle. His face that showed shock and some anger turned around, causing Mineva to feel that he was an upright person. She suppressed the rumbling feelings under her chest as she continued , "Who are the experts you're referring to?"

"The inquisitors or anyone related to the judicatory…"

"Nobody from the judicatory will be involved in this. The mission itself won't be exposed, and news of my detainment won't be reported."

It's pointless to talk more, and even if I do, nothing will change, and nothing can be redeemed. Despite this thought, Mineva continued to move her mouth that had been stiff silent for the entire day. Riddhe's expression changed as he turned to Mineva and asked, " What do you mean?"

"Just like what I said. Do you think this operation can be reported?"

"But this incidence and the detainment of Mineva Zabi…"

"If news of my detainment were exposed, Neo Zeon will have to take action. Why is it that Full Frontal was not willing to admit that I'm Mineva Zabi?"

"That's because he doesn't want our side to fight using a hostage…"

Riddhe swallowed back the words he wanted to say next as he shut up. "You'll understand if you think about it carefully." Mineva said as she looked down at the floor.

"The reason why I had not been captured for the past 4 years. The reason why Neo Zeon could built up its arms…"

The passionate Spacenoids' tragic wish for independence, the sacrifice of countless nameless warriors all by risking their lives for the sake of Neo Zeon's revival—these were the reasons but ideals alone would not do anything. Even anti-government movements would not be able to have power if the political environment and economy were not working. "You're saying that this is a planned thing? That the Federation and Neo Zeon set this up?" Riddhe asked, and Mineva took the doubt with a shameful feeling.

"The incident at "Industrial 7" will probably still have some mass coverage, but continuous reporting will disappear within 2 days. This will become an unforgivable phenomenon for those who lost their relatives or friends…but the Spacenoids are already used to the unreasonable acts by the Federation. The Federation had always allowed our existence silently, obviously to use us as a shield for dissentment."

It was a similar reason as to why police organizations would not hunt down triads seriously. It was similar to preventing the lawbreakers from scattering by uniting them in one trashbag. The Federation and Neo Zeon had been keeping this line, letting this gear of economy—the force called tension spin. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to call them birds of a feather instead of this being just a clever ploy. "This is the case up till now." Mineva added these words and kept quiet. "…Did the Laplace Box break the balance between both sides?" Riddhe mused as he showed an expression that an unknown circuit was connected inside him.

"Yes. But that is probably not all of it. The Federation probably wanted to establish its relationship with Neo Zeon if we consider the fact that a mobile suit like the "Unicorn" was developed. It's possible to think that because of this, the Vist Foundation moved the Box that had remained sealed up till now."

Cardeas once said that peace and stability were fragile. In this era, where ideals turned to nothingness, where even the resistance movements had to be 'managed', it was a lot easier to slip into the loopholes of the 'management'. Full Frontal, who had been raising arms under the 'management', only to vaguely show his deep intentions to break the current state, was like that. The same goes for the head of the Federation army carrying out the reorganization plan to cut military forces and wipe out Neo Zeon entirely. Cardeas probably wanted to introduce this catalyst, the Laplace Box, in order to turn this distorted world into something that could be seen by the naked eye. The memories of the War were long gone, and people believed that they could 'manage' war as well. Their senses showed indifference…and they ignored the signs of a great crisis.

Either way, it's useless to think about this again. Mineva looked at how she was being imprisoned and restricted on a Federation ship, and sighed slightly. If it could be as what Riddhe said, if she could be handed over to a public judicatory for a fair trial, she would be able to explain her current situation to more people. However, the chances of this would be bleak here. Once news of her detainment were revealed, Neo Zeon and even the Zeon supporters hidden in the Federation government would follow up and fight against the conservatives for their own political agendas that would continue.

As both sides continued to plot, the weary clashes that would be brought about would not be what they wanted. It would still be meaningful to consider Mineva Zabi as missing. *Will I be listed as an anonymous prisoner and get hidden by something? Will I have to change my name and get 'managed'? Or will it be the worst situation where my disappearance will have to be for real…this isn't impossible.*

Of course, it's another thing altogether with the Box. The Federation army will most likely carry out some operation to get back the "Unicorn Gundam" from "Palau". This Nahel Argama will be taking part in that battlefront too, I suppose. In the end, this is just an extended internal battle over the Box, and political muscle alone will not be able to settle things down. Even if the pilot of the "Unicorn" is alive, no one will care about whether he's dead or alive—

PARATROOPER

"…It's really hard to understand."

Mineva heard his musing and stopped her pessimistic thoughts as she lifted her face. She saw the extremely depressing looking Riddhe giving a tired look to the floor.

"I always deemed myself as a pilot. My job is to pilot a mobile suit, to actually finish the task I'm given, and not to think about any other unnecessary things. Even if there may be cons, I believed that the Federation government still has the power to correct it… no, this is just a lie. I just pretended not to look, not to think. It has been the same ever since I remained at ''family…"

It was a reasonable confession, but the term ''family *lingered in Mineva's ears abnormally for some reason. "Finally, please tell me something." Riddhe continued as he looked back at Mineva's eyes.*

"Since you already understand this, why did you still act on your own?"

This was a sincere question, and Mineva was somewhat shocked by Riddhe's upright stare as she answered with a wary and fearful look, "I too had a ''family *ever since I was born."*

"It was a ''family *that bored the crime of the One Year War. Some viewed me as a source of danger, and some would try to promote me as a sign of the revival of Zeon. No matter what, I could not break away from political ties. If the same mistake happened again, I have a duty to stop it even if it means giving up my life."*

"Even if another danger will happen because of your disappearance?"

"I said it already, did I not? The fact that I'm not around will not be revealed. To the people who treat politics as a way of life, I' m just a piece on a chessboard. However, this is not what politics should be about."

As she talked with Riddhe, Mineva realized that the vague thing she felt was forming into shape. "What the person at the scene should carry out…responsibility and duty, is that it?" Riddhe muttered to himself, and suddenly gave a determined stare to a corner of the wall. Mineva saw that he was looking for something, and inadvertently followed the stare, thinking about what the *family* Riddhe Marcenas was about. If it were the name Marcenas, the first thing she thought about was be the Prime Minister of the violent Federation Government…

"Oi, Riddhe. You should restrain yourself there."

The voice suddenly butted in, interrupting Mineva's thoughts. A guard with a helmet on appeared on the other side of the door grill's peephole.

"It's almost time for a swap. Even you can't get away easily if you're caught."

Got it. I'll go out now."

Riddhe nodded slightly at him, and turned to Mineva again. At this moment, Mineva noticed that the power indicator of the surveillance camera above Riddhe's head was not lit.

"I understand very well that you should be the one standing amongst the crowd to speak up. At the same time, I realize that I may not know anything at all."

The stare that was much calmer than how it was when Riddhe entered the room showed his outstanding learning ability. "But you're a person of Zeon." He wordlessly looked back at Mineva, who heard his stiff voice and clenched the fists on her knees tightly .

"We were once close privately, but you're still our enemy, the one who caused Squad Leader Norm to die. I can't forgive you like this."

It's to be expected for someone who has such emotions. Mineva understood that this feeling would cause people to make mistakes or save them, and took the show of determination of the youth in front of her with all she got. Riddhe turned around, and this time, really held onto the door handle.

"…I really hoped that we met somewhere else."

Mineva could not speak up, and she had no time to answer. Riddhe quickly stepped out of the door and closed it to cover his

back. The sound of the electronic lock activating reverbed. It remained in the one-person detention room for a while before disappearing.

Mineva sighed and leaned on the wall with the mat. She, who felt emotional, was so tired that she felt shocked. *There was no one who could learn anything or be saved through words.* She felt that she was the one who really did not know anything as she looked around the dim detention room.

If he can survive, Banagher will probably be detained like this. Mineva blankly thought of this in her mind, which became heavy as she closed her eyes. She, who had never taken a single nap ever since she was detained, did not take much more time to fall into a deep sleep.

Part 3

The sound of the electronic lock being opened rang, and what replaced it was the sound of knocking. Banagher Links' face left the window of the ship as he stared at the people appearing at the door.

As expected, Marida Cruz was standing there. Her shirt comprised of a crimson fabric with gold embroidery, matching the white pants that showed the figure of her legs. Her collar had the emblem of Zeon, the wings, on it, and the eyes above that were glowing quickly scanned the room. Marida knew that Bnagher did not have the strength to resist, but her cat-like stare would not relax as she showed no openings. The slender body that looked like it was in tightfitting clothes stepped into the room and put the food tray on the simple table.

Including this time, it had been two days since she brought food in. Including the time he passed out, it had been two days since he was detained in this ship. Banagher glanced at the food tray that had some randomly microwaved food, and stared at the side of Marida's face as she wore the uniform of the "Sleeves". The only noteworthy things in the cabin were the bed, the simple table, and the 30cm wide window, and her clear figure looked rather glamorous.

He recovered in the infirmary, and was then treated, questioned and detained. It was basically a repeat of his predicament in the Nahel Argama, but the air flowing inside this ship was basically different. *What's the name of this ship? Where's it heading? What about the "Unicorn" that's taken in as well?* Even when he asked, he would not get an answer. When he stubborn asked them, he got a killing stare. Besides, this was a ship belonging to the "Sleeves"—Neo Zeon. It could not be helped, but Banagher was already enemies with them.

I've already explained that he was not a Federation soldier, and also about how I met Audrey. It seems from the attitude of the interrogator, that I won't have to worry about being treated cruelly, but I can't relax here. Any treatment may happen as long as I'm involved with the " Unicorn". I might be drugged and questioned, tied up to a chair or something, forced to spill out everything, and become a vegetable— Banagher beat away these unstable thoughts as he continued to stare at Marida's action. At this moment, that face suddenly turned , and the sapphire blue eyes stared at Banagher without hesitation.

Banagher unwittingly gasped as he did not have time to even pull back as he was grabbed on the chin from behind and lifted. He was easily lifted right in front Marida, and their faces were right in front of each other. The deep blue eyes blinked as they stared at Banagher's eyes. The soft and gentle body odor reached Bangher's nose, who thought *So a female's sweat is sweet* in an inappropriate situation, only to be clumsily pushed backwards as he stuttered a few steps.

Banagher landed on the bed with his backside and immediately got up. Marida said with a straight expression "Your eyes are still bloodshot. Use this." and took out something from her pocket before tossing it to Banagher.

It was a spray canister that was large enough to be held in the hand. Obviously, it was an eye ointment that was meant to be used under zero gravity. "The weakest organs under gravity in a human body are the eyes." Marida continued, and Banagher stared back at her blankly.

"It's not weird for the eyeballs to pop out the way you were shaken at such speed. Rest your eyes as much as you can."

Marida turned her back on Banagher without waiting for an answer. The orange-tinge chestnut-colored hair that was tied in a knot—like what he saw at "Industrial 7" was gently released, and it seemingly mocked him as it swayed about like it was a kid. " Looks like you don't know anything at all." Banagher held onto the eye ointment tightly and retorted back,

"Are these the feelings of a soldier, or a terrorist?"

Banagher took the strength of Marida's lower body head on as he turned around. It was an expression that showed that she could use violence, one full of killing intent. As he did not succumb to this when he met her, it forcefully changed his fate after that. No, not just him; but also the fates of all the people in "Industrial 7".

He did not know what Marida did in that battle, but she was definitely one of the people who caused "Industrial 7" to be in such a huge mess. *Even if she shows concern, I can't let my guard down easily. Banagher used his trembling legs to steady himself on the low-gravity floor, and continued staring back at Marida, who answered back,*

"You're rather talkative after knowing that you won't be killed. "

The ounce of strength that was supporting Banagher was reduced to nothing once that unwavering voice stated his true thoughts. He could not find anything else to retort back about as he looked away.

"I feel that I am a soldier, but we will have differing opinions. There are armies who use hostages just to be saved."

"That's because…"

"The worst kind of people is those who will only criticize and not do anything on their own."

The forceful force caused the rebuttal Banagher was about to spew out from his mouth to dissipate. He swallowed his saliva and could only stare at the sapphire blue eyes that reminded him of the deep sea.

"You took action to help the Princess, so that's why you're being treated as such. In other words, you're already a part of it."

"This is…too one-sided. The reason why I'm allowed to live is because you want to understand the "Unicorn" more, right?"

"That's one of the reasons too."

"What about Audrey? She's been preventing the Laplace Box from falling into Neo Zeon's hands. Which do you think is more important? The Box or Audrey?"

"It's not our job to decide these things."

Marida turned her face away, seemingly trying to block out these words. Banagher realized that he seemed to have touched on a topic he should not have mentioned, and immediately shut up.

"Soon, we'll reach our home. All the decisions will be made there. Rest whenever you can."

"Home…?"

It was not a base or a headquarters, and the unfamiliar term home caused Banagher to frown. Marida touched the strands of hair beside her collar and gently used her chin to point at the other side of the window.

The Moon, Earth and Sun could not be seen in this bright space that was radiating with silver stars. At a point, a black shadow shaped like a bow was there. It was hard to tell the scale of it, but it did not look like a mere piece of rock floating in the shoal space region. If the lights were space navigation lights for the ships, the size of it should be bigger than a space colony. Perhaps it was a mining asteroid? Banagher brought his face as close to the small window as possible as he stared at this oddly-shaped rock. The sun in the distance shone on the tip of the bow-shaped rock, giving the vibe that it was at least the size of an asteroid. Multiple such asteroids were linked to each other, forming a bow-shaped large planet—

"That's "Palau", our home."

Marida said. Banagher moved his face slightly as he did not turn his stare away from the unknown world in front of him. The rocky surface full of craters was lit with numerous lights, and the asteroid called "Palau" showed its silent face in the middle of the eternal night.

Part 4

The base, a space colony, was built as part of the space migration plan, so obviously, it required a large number of resources. The number of resources they could extract from Earth was not enough ultimately, and cost-wise, it would not be effective to move materials from the atmosphere. Thus, the people in the old century turned their eyes on the Moon. They built a lasting resource extraction base on the Moon, and the next step was the

Asteroid Belt that existed in the region between Mars and Jupiter, a field abundantly rich in resources.

It was a hive of rocks that could not come together to form a planet because of the powerful gravity of Jupiter near it. In this belt, he floating asteroids there amounted to at least hundreds of thousands based on the observations in the old century, and it was said that there were millions of them. The overall mass of these rocks were said to be 1/35 the mass of the Moon, and most of them had outstanding minerals. Of course, these asteroids were not so concentrated that they had to be explained on an encyclopedia, and they were all sporadically scattered amongst the wide space. However, it was not impossible to lock onto a single asteroid and send an excavation team from the Earth Celestial Sphere. Also, once they knew that there was an asteroid that was suitable for mining, they would install nuclear pulse engines on it and head back to Earth on their shuttle. To humanity, which had welcomed the Universal Century, this was not a tough thing to do.

Amongst them, the most famous was the small asteroid Juno that was in the Moon's orbit during UC 0045, dubbed "Luna II". In the year 0060, it was made a military base called Luna Two. One purpose was to act as the largest headquarters for the Federation Army, while the other was to continue the mining activities. " Palau" was one of these mining space colonies as well. This colony was so isolated that nobody other than the people involved in colony business would know of, but it had an extraordinary history. It was said that some of the smaller colonies were dragged in from the Old Century. The added condition to the mentioned

part was because “Palau” was built by having many small asteroids linked to each other, which accounted for its unique bow-shape.

Simply put, a triangular block protruding out from the tip of the bow, and the bottom comprised of 3 irregularly shaped rocks connected to each other tightly. The 4 blocks that were too small to be called asteroids were connected by multiple shafts, and it would be hard to tell that they were not asteroids unless one looked from up close. This “Palau” was a mining satellite that was 30+km wide, 15km long in diameter maximum , and looked like some realistic imagery.

As with any mining satellite, the surface of the rocks had countless space gateways and monitors. The main portion, the triangular block had two round cylinders of living areas, and each embedded on 6km wide caves on the rock surfaces. There were approximately 30,000 people living in the residential area that was maintained by centrifuge force, just like a space colony. It seemed that these people lived by mining. That was Maridas’s explanation. The ship Banagher was on—the Neo Zeon’ flagship “Lewloola” entered “Palau” together with the “Garencieres” that was disguised as a trading ship.

The ships did not enter from the space gateway on the surface, but got into a gap where the 4 blocks of rock were leaning and attached to each other. Banagher understood that the structure was the inner hollow that was dug out, creating a ‘port’ that could not be seen from the outside. However, this was all he could tell from the window of the hull. As the pressurizing rock formation and the large intertwined shafts were right in front of the windows,

Banagher thought that they finally made it through, only to be taken out of the room. The moment his view expressed, he felt that he saw several ships docked in the enclosed conical-shaped space and mobile suits moving around, but Marida held onto his head, allowing him no time to check. Banagher was accosted outside, took the standard precautionary checks, and stepped onto "Palau".

He had no chance to see the entire port. He passed through the zero gravity block, moved to a structure that looked like a terminal , and saw a chartered linear car waiting for them. This was a similar kind of transportation as the "Subway" used in the space colony, but they were really moving underground. Amongst the passengers, there were several men said to be crew of the " Garencieres" other than Marida. They obviously showed a different vibe from the crew of the "Rewloola". Everyone were wearing glamorous looking uniforms with gold lacing, but there was the feeling that these did not feel them. In the old times, there was the saying *Clothes makes the man* , but there seemed to be exceptions to that rule. Perhaps the vibe of not liking fancy outfits outweighed the rest here. Either way, these people did have the vibe of being part of a yakuza.

From the conversation, it seemed that Marida was a crew member of the "Garencieres". *Why was she the only one on the " Rewloola" and taking care of me?* Banagher did not have time to think as the linear car moved, while the scenery outside the window was filled with rocks. After 5 minutes, they came out of the passage, and the excavation field that was dug into "Palau" appeared right in front of him. He looked like a primary school student experiencing a field trip as he stuck his face on the wall, not moving at all.

The excavation field seemed to pass through the triangular conical star, approximately 400m in diameter and more than 10km in length. This extraordinarily large space was surrounded by multiple network-like shafts. It was said that these shafts were connected to the living quarters and the port and other places. The final point of the excavation field however had an automatic firing system—a Mass Driver. It looked like it would shoot out the minerals that were dug out. Banagher deduced this from what he saw from the window, and basically, the facilities in the mining field reminded Banagher of his old home.

The factories that were near the walls of the cave did not seem to be working, and the mining machinery placed all over showed no signs of operating. Everything was covered in rust and dust, and there was the sense of a reddish-brown color fading in with the rocks. There were a few mini mobile suits moving the rocks, flying around numbly in the work environment without gravity, but the models were so old it was scary. Half of the solar panels of the artificial Sun could not be seen, and a mere sunset-like light was shown. Only the term 'emptiness' could describe the current scene beside the abandoned quarry there.

"It was not like this before. About 50 years ago, when the building of colonies was rampant, the chimneys here would be giving off smoke. It was said that people could not see the other level because of the smoke that was puffing out…however, the rocks here were not of outstanding minerals. Ever since mining excavation began here, there would be some other bits of stone

mixed in to add up, and they managed to somehow bluff their way through. Right now, we've finished digging up as much as we can, and we only dig up some spare change."

The one sitting beside him, Gilboa Sant, looked outside the window as he said. As a crew member of the "Garencieres", he was an earnest looking black man who looked to be approximately 30. Also, he seemed to be a citizen native to this "Palau". At least, when he was Banagher's age, this place was not called "Palau". When the colony committee decided to close this place down, an investor from somewhere bought this star, and named it "Palau" after the place on Earth that was attacked. Ever since then, "Palau" was designated as a special administrative zone under Side 6, and that investor safely took the role of superintendent. In the old century terms, it was basically buying a desolated island from a country. He could call himself a superintendent, but in fact, he was like a villager. Gilboa explained to Banagher,

"In the past, the Republic of Zeon once had a space base called " Solomon", right? It seemed that this "Palau" was named because of the place that was attacked. Both these names were names of islands on Earth, but Solomon was the name of a king in a myth, and had nothing to do with that island. Anyway, they're just trying to being trendy."

Simply put, everyone on "Palau" was a full-fledged Zeon supporter. He probably hoped that there would be special needs after the war as he continued to buy mining quarries that could not be run while providing these resources to Neo Zeon. The Side 6 that became a pivotal point everyone knew of during the war was said to have some secret relations with the Republic of Zeon. If the

superintendent allowed, it was not impossible to hide from the Federation's eyes at this place. This was the case after the Second Neo Zeon War, when the government actively purged the remnants of Zeon.

We've now entered the phase of exterminating in this Zeonism War the Federation declared this, but had not done anything to the entire satellite that was filled with resources and made into a base. Banagher's dull mind was stimulated because of this, and it seemed to let him understand that the 'relationship' between the Federation and Neo Zeon was not as what he imagined, but he did not have the time to think more. The bearded man who was travelling with them glanced over at Gilboa who was rattling out careless, giving a look to tell him to stop, and Banagher unwittingly looked into this bearded man's stare.

He was the man the crew called the captain. Ever since they met , Banagher had been wondering, *Those were the eyes alright.* He was the man who pointed his gun at Banagher in "Industrial 7". He met the blond guy beside before, and recalled. *Speaking of which, that ship that ruined my job by docking in that morning was the " Garencieres".*

They were already implicated with this situation right from the beginning. The man who chased after the stowaway Audrey and sent Marida over was most likely this guy—this captain called Zinnerman. Banagher looked over at Zinnerman, and sat down on the seat that was slanted at the front. *If these guys never came, "Industrial 7" would be okay.* The rage swelled up in him as the fear that they controlled his fate exploded at the same time, causing both emotions to form a vortex within him. However, Zinnerman did

not look at Banagher anymore. Gilboa shrugged as he stopped talking too, leaving only the sound of the linear car moving.

Banagher sighed as he looked at Marida, who was looking at the back of Zinnerman's head as she sat on a seat opposite. Those sapphire blue eyes were looking like she was being loyal to her superior, oozing with an odd sense of passion. Her tense face was rather outstanding amongst the other crew members who were randomly looking around and relaxed.

What kind of relationship do they have? Banagher could not find words to ask, and had no courage to ask as his eyes escaped to the window. There was a large quarry below the linear car, below the shafts on the walls—though it was a meaningless description under this zero gravity environment. They sped on, reached a fork soon after, turned towards a cave, and the car moved towards one of the many shafts.

The quarry passed his eyes, and the narrow passage again surrounded the linear car. For a moment, darkness visited the car, covering Marida's worried looking expression

Part 5

The group got off the linear car that reached its destination and got on the elevator leading to the residential area. As he felt the unique feeling of his abdominal muscles, the elevator descended 800m, sending Banagher's group to the gravity block of the "Palau ".

The group did not head for the city located within the walls, but went through the lobby and head for another underground passage. It looked to be a service route for work as they passed through many gates that were defended by armed guards. As Zinnerman and Marida quickly moved on, Banagher inadvertently stopped to look past the other side of the gate.

The pillars supporting the roads had become round ones with cravings, and the walls had a grassy green fabric with Arabian patterns hanging off them. The worn out wall lights lit the red carpet that was laid all over the place. Waiting at the end was the large archway-shaped doors were two soldiers dressed in khaki uniforms, a short mantle, and wide rimmed helmets, giving an aged feeling. They were the same as the Republic of Zeon soldiers that were thought in history textbooks. The remnants of a defeated country, what looked like dead souls of soldiers that escaped a war museum were looking back at Banagher.

Zinnerman stood in front of the door, wearing a black shirt with gold laces. The Zeon soldiers gave a salute, and swiftly opened the door. The space acting as the staff room, which may be too big, appeared behind the door, causing Banagher to gasp a second time . The ceiling inside should be around 2 levels tall, and the 4 round pillars had spiral shaped carvings. There was an oil painting hanging above the electric heater that seemed to be for heating purpose <--!Didn't make this up-->, and the curtains draped on both left and right sights gave a solemn feeling that was hard to tell if they were antiques. The unevenness of the teeth-shaped ornaments could be seen on the beam, and even the ceiling lights cover had similar carvings that showed the delicate skill of the

craftsman. All the furniture showed some form of balance, and yet showed a luxury that one might mistake to be nobility in a palace.

Despite looking antique, it had no semblance to past designs. Banagher was overwhelmed by this scene that could only be described as Zeonism as he remained stunned. The Vist family too had an antique feel, but it was different. If the Vist family's scene could be described as being based on luxury, this would give goosebumps while looking like it was meant to intimidate others. It looked to be an expression of culture by the people sent from Earth to the furthest Side, made after they got over their self-defeat—as they lost the Republic, they could only live in the dusty-smelling depths of the caves, a sand habitat that was like a flash in the pan. Banagher did not feel fear or uneasy, just weird as he stared at the anomaly sitting right in front of him.

That man was wearing a red uniform, wearing a mask as he faced Banagher. *Is he a human?* This was the first impression Banagher had. He could not detect any sense of lift from that man, not just from the mask covering his eyes, but also the vibe that he was artificially created. He stared at the masked man who sat on the Mahogany made office table, and seriously thought that it might really be part of the decorations in the room. However, that man said "I admit, this is not in good taste.", shocking him.

"The superintendent of this "Palau" is a supporter of the old Zeon republic. Our army did not request anything from him when we regrouped, but he built this command post. It's said that he replicated the interior decorations final base of the old republic army—A Baoa Qu."

It was hard to tell if it was the mask talking in front of Banagher , as that was a slightly chilly voice. The masked man continued as he stared at the silent Banagher, "You have to accept other people' s kind intentions honestly."

"Although it doesn't actually fit my tastes, I think it is also one of the required qualities of a leader."

Before Banagher could respond, the stare went through the anti-glare filter and stared right at Zinnerman's group. "It's been tough on you, Captain. You do not have to accompany us here." On hearing this, Zinnerman answered, "Yes, Captain Full Frontal." His heavy voice echoed through the room.

Full Frontal…Banagher stared back at this masked man as Zinnerman and Marida walked out of the room. He heard of this name before. Banagher had an impression of this name being mentioned by someone on the Nahel Argama when he hurriedly launched out. *The Red Comet, the Man called the Second Coming of Char—that's right, it's the pilot of that red mobile suit. That Char who appeared on the news during the Republic era too used a mask to cover his face…*

"What is it? Please take a seat."

The unexpectedly earnest voice came from below the mask, causing Banagher's mind to rid itself of its arranged thoughts. He resisted the urge to get up as he sat on the sofa beside the heater. A young soldier wearing a white servant uniform immediately

closed in and poured red tea into the teacup on the table. As the servant left without looking at him, Banagher sensed that there was another stare looking at him.

It was a young officer standing beside Frontal. Despite wearing a bright green uniform, his sense of presence was covered by the masked man, and Banagher did not notice him…or rather, perhaps he was deliberately trying to keep a low profile as she stood beside . Either way, the stare on Banagher was exceptionally tight when compared to Frontal's, intimidating Banagher a little. The servant walked out of the room, and the ones left to talk to were him and Frontal. Banagher felt that he was giving a very imposing stare from a corner.

Right beside him, Frontal did not say anything. He put his arms on the table, locking his fists and using them to support his chin, giving a machine-like stare at Banagher. Banagher could not tell where the stare was looking from under the mask, and instead of being fearful, he wanted to know what kind of people they were, and how they intended to deal with him. *If I keep waiting for them to talk, I'll be devoured by the pressure under the mask.* Banagher looked down at the floor once, wiped the sweat on his hands off his knees, and decided to ask, "Excuse me…"

"Are you the man piloting that red mobile suit?"

The young officer quickly narrowed his eyes, and Frontal's lips showed a smile.

"What will you do if I say you were? Are you unable to have tea with an opponent you fought before? Young Banagher Links."

With a voice of ridicule, the observer's stare cling onto him. Banagher understood that his body was being probed, and reacted as his trembling hand reached for the red tea and put it to his lips. He could not taste the flavor or aroma, and even the heat. "Good response." Frontal's voice could be heard clearly.

"However, you never considered the consequences. This is the nature of a pilot."

Frontal casually got up and got closer to Banagher, whose stare was robbed by the lush blond hair while being distracted by the rose in a vase, the only decoration on the table. Up till now, the red rose had been swallowed by the presence of the Red Comet. In this room that was covered with artificial things, this was a blood-colored flower that asserted life…

"I'm Captain Full Frontal. I'm grateful for what you did for Her Highness Mineva. This invitation might be a little violent, so please forgive me for this."

Frontal stood in front of Banagher and reached his right hand out, while Banagher hurriedly look back at him. He was about to inadvertently respond to Frontal, only to clench his hand that was about to reach out. *No, I can't let him get his way.* Banagher felt a pulsating pain from his temples as he said cautious, "It might be rude to ask, but may I ask if that mask is really used for hide a wound?"

Frontal showed an unexpected expression on his lips as he put his hand. The young officer over his shoulder gave a more menacing glare, and Banagher looked up at the eyes under the mask.

"If that's not the case, I hope to see your face."

"You bastard…!" The young officer muttered as he stepped forward, but Frontal raised his hand to stop him.

"It's alright, Lieutenant Angelo. Young Banagher is talking about some basic etiquette."

The young officer called Angelo stopped in his tracks. The stare under the anti-glare filter stared back at Banagher, who took the stare from the person taller than him while exerting strength in his nearly limp knees.

"This might be considered part of a fashion statement. I might say it can be considered a method of propaganda."

As he said this, the hands covered by the white gloves reached for the mask. *Ah.* As Banagher thought this way, Frontal simply removed the mask.

The clear blue eyes first entered his eyes, and then, the old scars at the middle of his eyebrows was etched his stare. The nose bridge that formed a nice line was not repulsive, giving a nice tension that those young people of Caucasian ethnicity would have. The only thing outstanding was that the cheekbones did not

reflect his age, but this may be a thought after comparing the image of Char Aznable in photos. Basically, there were no actual signs of flaws, and Banagher swallowed the saliva after forgetting to do so as he faced this handsome face that could not be described simply as proper looking.

"I forgot to take it off because no one would honestly say it out like you. My apologies."

This time, Frontal put his mask under the armpit and reached his hand out again. This time, there was no reason to refuse as Banagher held on his again. The hand under the glove felt rather hard, causing Banagher to remember the first impression of a puppet he had in his mind, but this may be because of the bad feelings he had when he ended up caught in the other party's pace. Banagher decided to control himself as he held back from thinking further.

"I heard you met Her Highness Mineva."

Frontal stepped back towards his table, and spoke, "However, as for how the mobile suit of the Vist Foundation…the "Unicorn" was handed to you, there's still a lot I don't understand. That was a machine our army should receive, so why did Cardeas Vist choose you to carry the Laplace Box…"

"I said it before. I don't know any specifics in this."

Banagher supported his body that was questioned out of a sudden as he said while seemingly interrupting the other party's words. Frontal put his mask on the table and turned to Banagher, asking as he sat on the chair, "Is that so?"

"The Vist Foundation managed to maintain its prosperity and riches as they secretly kept the Box. There must be a plan that could not be changed easily for the Vist Foundation to break the negotiation with the Federation government. The initial plan was messed up, but it's hard to believe that Cardeas would hand the Box over to a random passer-by. It's natural to view you as someone related to the Foundation in someone, like for example…"

Frontal did not let go of the moment when Banagher inadvertently looked up, narrowed his eyes and continued, "Let's say, you already were someone related to the Vist family…how about that?"

"Do I have a duty to answer?"

Banagher blurted out these words as his heart suddenly raced. Sharp footsteps could be heard as the young officer called Lieutenant Angelo walked towards Banagher. His hand suddenly reached for Bangher's chest without warning.

His expression showed no signs of the old poker face as he showed real killing intent. In his old hometown, Banagher often saw people with some random problems showing such an expression out of a sudden as their faces overlapped with this

young officer. As he felt this icy feeling from the bottom of his heart, Frontal interjected, “I said to stop it, Angelo.”

The tense-looking brows forced out wrinkles as he finally let go of Banagher grudgingly. His back was turned at Banagher, showing no signs of openings, and his footsteps obviously looked like he trained in this, but not enough to wipe off the first impression Banagher had of him—that he had a very bad background. Frontal waited for Angelo to return behind him, and silently continued, “You don’t have a duty to answer.”

“However, we still want information on the Box. It’s because of the factor that is Her Highness Mineva that we’re asking you in such a gentle manner. I hope you remember this.”

It was an obviously threatening line, and one that could give a chill. Banagher clenched his sweaty hands and answered, “That Mineva…Audrey once told me.”

“She said that the Box must not be handed over to Neo Zeon, or there’ll be another great war.”

“Oh.” Frontal merely continued without wavering, “If we consider what happened at “Industrial 7”, I would have the same feeling as he.” Banagher got up and tried to argue back.

“She’s the Princess of Zeon, right? If Audrey argues against it, why are you…”

“Then, do you believe in the existence of the Laplace Box?”

This was a question Banagher had never thought of. Frontal stared at the speechless Banagher as he gradually continued,

"Do you feel that no one had saw and validated the contents of the Box, whether it had the power to topple the Federation government?"

"Well…I don't know. But I think there'll be something like knowledge or information that could cause the world's balance to collapse."

"For example?"

"Like for example…how Zeon first let a space colony fall, or how they destroyed an asteroid and sent it to Earth to force it to freeze. It's nothing after hearing it, but who would have expected such things to happen? The invention of nukes, and the horrifying wars that happened in the old ages…and it's the same for the development of Minovsky Particles and mobile suits. They're right beside us, yet no one noticed. A little invention or discovery will allow the world's balance to change slightly…

Banagher did think of saying this when he was with Audrey before this, but even he was shocked that he could express himself so fluidly like this. "Correct." Frontal again got up from his seat after concluding.

"This isn't something that can be understood by memorizing a timeline. From the way you explain things, you should know that Spacenoids were once part of the civilian abandonment plan, right ?"

An unexpected line was tossed right back at Banagher, causing him to answer back with only silence. Frontal left the office and walked with a stroll-like pace as he closed in on Banagher.

"In the past, Zeon Deikun once said that only those people who came to space could head for innovation. This meant that humanity got used to its environment and evolved…Newtypes. To the bureaucrats who sending the leftover population to space and remained on Earth, this thinking itself basically toppled their standpoint. That's why they suppressed Zeonism and Side 3 that was promoting it. This is an example of what you say can cause the world to topple."

The boots let out a tapping sound on the floor as he got behind Banagher, who was unable to turn behind.

"In the end, Zeon was assassinated, and the Zabi family rose up from it to build the Republic of Zeon. They chose to fight back the Federation government's suppression with force. The 'inventions' of mobile suits and colony drop fighting was the result of the power given to Zeon Republic to match the Federation. Humanity lost half its population, but it could be seen as a deliberate reduction in population Gihren Zabi planned when he used racism to replace Zeonism.

Everyone knew right now that Zeon was killed by the Zabi family's treachery. The Zeon Republic had such a crime, and after a year's war, it fell defeated. However, this helped the Federation's call, causing the Earth Central Administration to expand every day . The people who step into space would not be allowed back on Earth without the government's permission. Despite each Side's

autonomous rule being recognized, the authority of the leaders were still held by the Central government. Spacenoids had basically no right to take part in politics when they could not elect the Senate Council. During this time, Earth continued to develop again under the name of recovering from the war, and 2 billion residents lived on space produce and food. In the end, the tens of billions of Spacenoids who were forced to migrate in order to let Earth recover naturally were still accomplices in destroying Earth. ”

Frontal got behind Banagher as he said while sticking close to his nick. Banagher felt goosebumps by this jolt that basically felt like it was melting his body.

“Our Neo Zeon do have believers in the Zabi family’s customs. Some believed in Zeon Deikun’s ideals, and dreamed of building a real Republic of Zeon. However, their common goal is to change this twisted system. To break the shackle of the Federation, to fulfill self-autonomy for Spacenoids, we should—“

“BUT TERRORIST ATTACKS AREN’T TO GO!”

Banagher stopped the voice that was seeping through his pores as he yelled, “NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF LOGIC IT IS, IT’S NOT RIGHT TO ROB OTHER PEOPLE OF THEIR LIVES ONE-SIDEDLY. NO ONE HAS THAT RIGHT!”

He remembered that none of Micott’s friends were left alive, not even a fingernail as they were turned into dust, and their ugly corpses caused Banagher to puke. And then, there was that man—Cardeas Vist’s cooling blood. He felt these sensations that

were still on his palms *I'm not wrong here,* Banagher told himself. *Humans should live like humans and die like humans. I definitely can't allow for other people to cut other people's lives down like that.* As he repeated this in his heart, Frontal's presence near the neck left, and asked another question to make him doubt, "Then, what about you who fight with a Gundam?"

"If all military forces are full of guilt, you're the same for using the "Gundam". Because of you, we lost one of our precious soldiers."

"Because of you…?"

Banagher was pushed away by an invisible hand as he felt that he tripped and missed his footing. "It was a stray shot, but you're the one who shot it. This fact will not change." Frontal continued as he walked back to the table. His back looked rather distorted, and Banagher felt that he was sliding into a bottomless abyss that opened below his feet as he merely stood there blankly. *What is he saying? When did it happen? I didn't feel that I hit any enemy suits. I was just squeezing the trigger in a mindless manner.*

This me here, killed a person…

"Call Zinnerman in."

Frontal's voice sounded rather distant. Banagher sensed that Angelo was picking up the internal phone, but his body and mind could not move. *I have to think. I have to think of something before I'm swallowed into this bottomless abyss.* The more he got anxious, the more his thoughts got erratic, and he knew that his fingertips were

becoming cold and stiff. This shell called Banagher Links was collapsing, gradually becoming something else—

"You still have lots to learn. I hope you'll understand more about us. After that, I'll be grateful if you can become of outstanding assistance to us."

Frontal said. He picked up the mask on the table, and seemingly at that moment, Zinnerman and Marida entered the room. *Are both of them gasping because they just saw Frontal's true appearance?* A slight electric wave passed through Banagher's mind as he wanted to turn to the duo behind him, but was unable to do move. During this time, he could tell that Marida's arm was reaching for his shoulder, forcing him to turn back, and his rooted feet finally managed to take a step.

Banagher was dragged off like this as he was accosted to the archway-shaped doors. Right before he was about to pass it, it stopped, and turned back to look at Frontal at the table. He ignored Marida's surprised stare as she stopped, and let out a hoarse voice, "Excuse me…"

"Are you Char Aznable?"

Zinnerman, who was standing beside him, frowned as he turned his stare to Frontal. Angelo shot a menacing glare to Banagher for a moment, only to turn his awaiting stare at the owner of the mask. Even Banagher himself was not sure why he asked such a thing. However, his thought of deciding things based

on the response had not changed as he stared at Frontal who already had his mask on. Frontal focused his stare on the lone flower on the table,

"The me now stipulates myself as a vessel."

"Vessel…?"

"This vessel here is used to carry the thoughts of the people who were abandoned into space, and inherit the grand wish of those who inherit Zeonism. If they hope for it, I'll become Char Aznable. This mask exists for that."

Frontal lifted his stare that was covered by the anti-glare mask and looked back at Banagher. The earnest expression was looking back at him, and for a short moment, he lost his voice. However, a mask was a mask, not a true face. *Perhaps I might not have seen the true appearance of this man?* Banagher recalled the beautiful blue eyes, and felt that he was following an illusion as he lost all strength to talk and walked out of the room.

Banagher glanced behind before the doors closed. The lips under the mask seemed to be smiling at the lone flower. The bright rose and Angelo's heinous face showed a refreshing feeling beside the mask.

Part 6

The door was closed, and he inadvertently sighed. Angelo Sauper checked himself for feeling this unknown pressure, felt a little enraged, and asked Frontal beside him, "Is this alright?"

"Zinnerman's experienced in this. Leave it to him."

Frontal answered with an emotionless expression. Despite not talking too much, their thoughts could connect. Angelo felt relieved by how he could feel this like usual, and recalled that it was not the same when the boy was around, and felt incensed by this. *The Captain actually left me out of focus when Banagher Links was around…*

"I'm more concerned about the Federation's movements compared to this. According to how the situation goes, we may have to abandon this palce."

Angelo did not know if his feelings reached Frontal who stated some pragmatic things. He said, "He…as in "Palau, Sir?" he asked.

"That mobile suit has something to do with the Box alright. Once the mobile suit got taken away, the Federation will be desperate. It's correct to view that the political safety "Palau" offers has disappeared."

"You mean the Federation will take action here?"

"A very high possibility. They're probably try attacking here in a full-scale battle."

From the number of ships moving in and out of "Palau", there's a high chance that the Federation casted us away. A weak group must remain tense in order to maintain a large and fat organization. The thrill of them attacking with a weak attitude is enough. It's about to begin. The time to shed the sheepskin of Federation 'management' has come. The

time for the Neo Zeon army to revive has arrived. Angelo secretly held back the rising sensation in him as he stared at this man who should be the king of the New World. Frontal took the rose and put it near his lips, lowering his head as he continued, "How's the investigations of the "Unicorn" goin?"

"We're using the information Anaheim provided. We're analyzing the OS at this moment."

"NT-D…they call it the Newtype-Drive, is it? It's fishy."

Angelo though it was the smell of the rose at that moment as he let out a voice "Eh?" At this moment, Frontal got up, and said,

"Anaheim said that it was a mobile suit designed based from the data of the "Sinanju", but I don't think that's it. I could feel a form of madness from that "Gundam". Tell them to hurry up with their analysis. Maybe Cardeas Vist handed the key of the Box to an unbelievable monster."

Frontal slowly handed over the rose in his hands over to Angelo , and did not look at him as he left. The reliable shoulders were showing fatigue. "Yes!" Angelo straightened his back as he watched Frontal leave from the office. The crimson red bed left the archway doors, and once his back disappeared from the closing doors, Angelo finally looked back at the rose he received.

In this quarry satellite, it was hard to obtain even a stalk of rose. This was ordered from the florist the superintendent used, and sent from neighboring colonies to be grown here. It was Angelo's job to put the rose on Frontal's table everyday. *Did The Captain*

notice that I'm the one who chose the vase? Angelo suddenly thought as he turned his stare to the vase that was standing there in a lonely manner, and recalled the 'vessel' Frontal said before.

"He's so tired, and yet wants to bear the fate of the world…"

Angelo looked back at the rose in his hands. The deep red petals that marveled the shortness of life exerted its will in a suffocating manner. *The Captain's color… the color of flames that burned his body. This is the color of that man who saw the abyss of this space, and is coming back to this world with destiny on his back.* Angelo suddenly could not control his impulses as he crushed the stem of the rose with all he got.

"He actually let that kind of boy see his true appearance…!"

The blood that dripped from his fist flowed down the stem, staining the floor.

Part 7

The toughness of the hand that held his back was trained through guns. Daguza Mackle felt relieved by this usual strength.

"it's been a while, Daguza Squad's commander. You're looking rather bad there, aren't you?"

The Arabian ethnicity was shown on Commander Nasri Razal's black skin as he showed an earnest smile. He was 43 years old, short, but had a firm body that looked rather lively, and he was definitely competent in leading the strong warriors of ECOAS.

Daguza covered his left arm that had a cast on it as he answered, " Don't mention it."

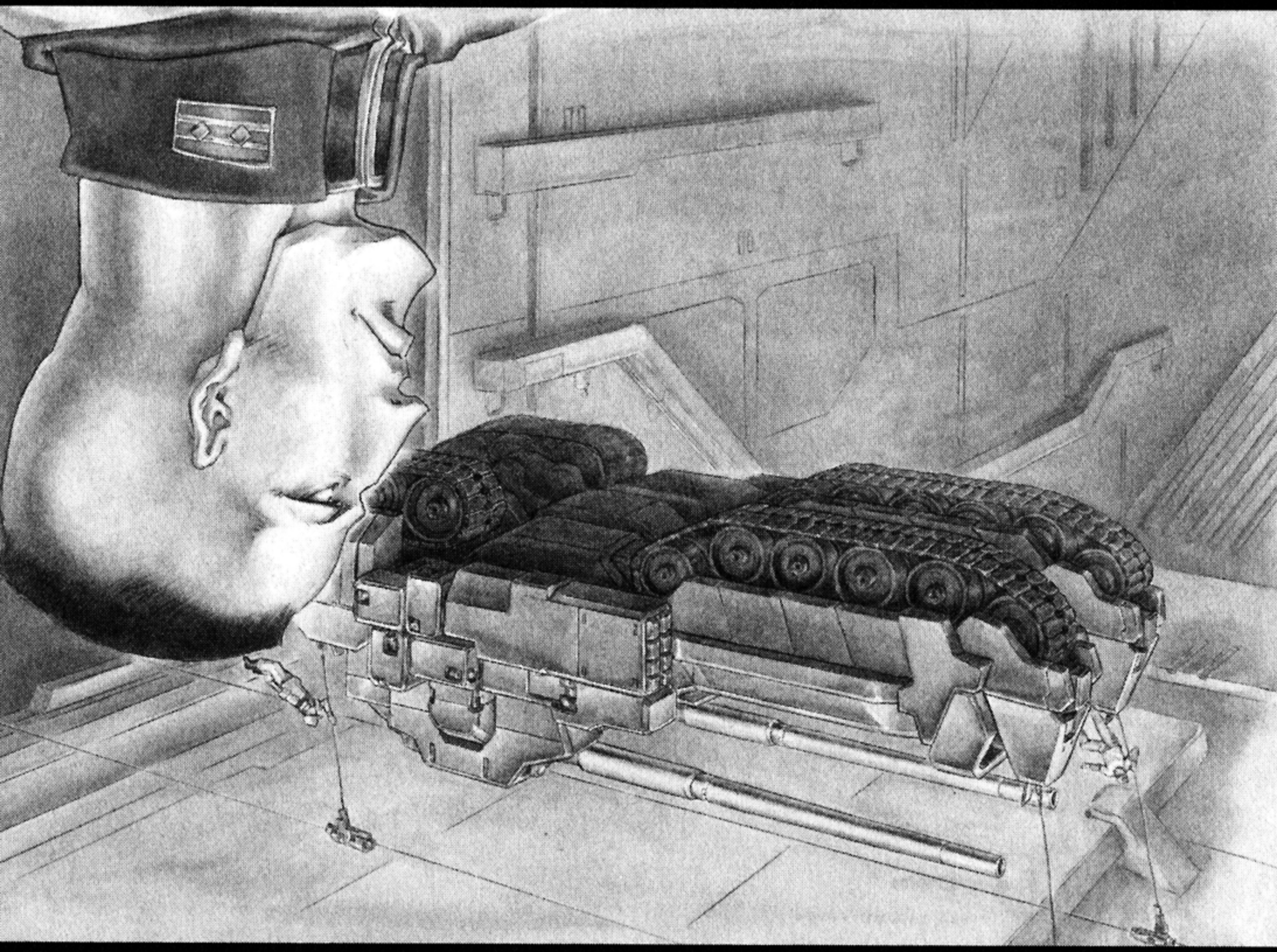
"Unlike you, I'm working hard here."

"That's called reaping what you sow. You're too serious. Isn't it the same as the mock battle before? What's with you? Common sense says that you have to go easy if there's no General here to obvious."

"I feel that we did go easy."

"You sure can say that. Our squad was messed around by yours . I'll pay this debt soon."

Speaking till here, Nasri kept his smile and tapped his boots, giving a solid salute. "ECOAS 729 reporting with Nasri Razal and 24 members. We shall now join forces with ECOAS 920 as of this moment." Daguza too raised his hand to salute back at Nasri's energetic voice. At this moment, Nasri's forces were moving in machinery as a "Loto" suspended by cables was moving up to the mobile suit deck in tank form. Daguza put his hand down and looked at the machinery being moved in together with Nasri who ended his salute.



The vehicle with the squad serial number 729 etched on it was a long-ranged support type with two barrels of cannons protruding out. Daguza was relieved to see the backup equipment they requested, and a few ECOAS members were surrounding the vehicle to check on it. The "Loto" being moved in was equipped with 4 rapid-fire Gatling cannons, and including the ammunition, all sorts of supplies were being loaded on the deck. Daguza confirmed these as he heaved a sigh of relief while Nasri did not realize it. *Despite these formalities, such equipment won't be enough. But at least we have a minimum amount of preparation. Our side is finally released from being on standby in this shoal space region, and now we can think of the next step—*

It had been 72 hours since they fought Neo Zeon twice. This thought was prevalent amongst the crew who were on the Nahel Argama as well. They looked up at the equipment that was passing through the two suspensions hanging near the ceiling towards the access gateway, looking like they missed their friends as they moved around the mobile suit deck. The ECOAS reinforcements that were following Nasri stood right behind. There were 4 carriers and all sorts of spare parts used to repair the severely damaged ship. The supply ship that was connected to this ship was able to send these goods over, and the empty mobile suit deck became a lot livelier. The portside catapult that was blown off could not be saved, but the ship's repair was not bad enough to cause much of a problem, so they should be able to get away from their current drifting state.

However, they would have to see if the Senate Council gave any unreasonable commands or not before everyone could relax. It was

rather efficient of them to be able to prepare such a resupply in such a short time, including their beloved ECOAS, but even the Senate Council's orders would not be enough for this mobilization. Leaving aside the ECOAS "Loto", they had only 5 working mobile suits in this ship. The ship's repairs were done on those parts that would be used in battle. "I saw it from the outside. You were wrecked." Nasri said, and it did not seem like sarcasm to Daguza.

"The mobile suit deck is basically empty…common sense wise, I feel that we should dock first, but the higher-ups want us to continue fighting in this situation?"

"Do you feel uneasy?"

"Nope. We're just hear for a ride and wreck some stuff. It has nothing to do with our operation."

The fearless expression was hidden in Nasri's black eyes as his beard-covered lips were curled up, "Then, where do you want us to start work?"

Daguza's Squad 920, Nasri's 729. The organization's history was not little in any sense, but it was the first time in history that two squads of ECOAS would be working together. Daguza saw Nasri shake things off with a relaxed expression, and was about to talk about the operation strategy they never mentioned before, only to hear an excited voice, "AWESOME! IT'S THE "HYAKU SHIKI!" Daguza and Nasri both looked over.

The young man was wearing a navy-blue colored jumper and jeans as he kicked the container and glided through the docking

gate. It was one of the civilians being held on board, and as Daguza recalled that his name was probably Takuya Irei, a middle-aged NCO growled "OI! DON'T JUST RUN IN HERE LIKE THIS!" as he followed in, causing Daguza to look over at where both of them were heading to. An unfamiliar mobile suit was moved inside at the large docking gate that was 20m long.

It was a streamlined human-shaped mobile suit that was colored grey. The unit was made in the streamlined Federation unit style, but it did not look as rigid as the "Jegan" or the " ReZELs". The complicate and intricate design on the surface had a slenderness that was more like a human body. The machine had two binders that were upright, and it resembled an Archangel the way the wings were closed. What was more characteristic however was the head, as what looked like a visor on the eyes was installed on the face. It looked to be a dual-eye sensor, and made this mobile suit's 'face' resemble a "Gundam".

"That is?"

"I hear that it's one of the prototype transformable units. They probably dragged it out from the bottom of the warehouse to make up numbers. I think it's called "Delta Plus" or something…"

Nasri answered as he did not look at the mobile suit, but at Takuya who did not look like a soldier. "What's with that?" He showed a stern expression as he answered, and Daguza let out a three-day worth of sigh.

"We got involved in a lot of things…"

Where should we begin? As Daguza was thinking about this, Daguza had already climbed up to the top of the "Delta Plus", inspecting the visor that reached the ceiling and the cockpit. The NCO grabbed onto his leg, but was unable to look away from the shiny new machine. "What the heck? Who put this mobile suit with low interchangeability into this ship?" The NCO grumbled, " This is a dream machine. It's one of the Hyaku-type machines in the Z testing projects. If the transformation is complete, it can be really somewhat powerful." Takuya lectured, and the NCO frowned as he said, "Isn't that Z project 10 years ago or something …" "TAKUYA!" A sharp voice rang throughout the deck.

"What are you doing there? We're moving out once the movement is complete. Hurry up and get ready."

The NCO too was shocked by this voice that was let out by Micott Bartsch. She was wearing light yellow parka and hot pants that would definitely not be seen on a military ship. Her nice long legs were exposed as she got over the container beside her and let her feet land on the deck, not waiting for Takuya, "Even if you tell me that, I have nothing to prepare!" as he reluctantly left the machine. As they passed by each other, Micott suddenly looked at Daguza near here.

She gasped in shock, and looked away. The stiff face showed a gloomy expression, just like how it was when she 'leaked the information'. This act triggered quite the chemical reaction, causing Micott's friend to be on the brink of danger. *I don't know how she's handling this reality.* Daguza did not think too much into these as another voice interrupted, "Are you two ready?" He looked over at the source of this voice, and saw the petite figure of

Ensign Mihiro Oiwakken, who was assigned to take care of the civilians, about to land on the deck.

As Mihiro looked over at Micott, she did not look at Daguza's and company, trying her best to look away from the ECOAS members in this precarious situation. She grabbed the rooted Micott on the shoulder and said, "Come on. You don't have to stay here any longer." as she left the scene. Daguza sighed as he saw them leave without turning back, and watched Takuya, who once glanced at him, leave. *That's fine. We're the ones guilty here—we, ECOAS, used the 'leaked information' to use a hostage and carried out a despicable battle. Just hate me as long as you don't blame youself…*

"Looks like you really got involved in a lot of things."

Nasri watched the trio leave as he said with an expression of different meaning. On hearing this voice Daguza shrugged at this man who understood ECOAS' standpoint very well.

Part 8

(To be honest, even I was shocked when your father contacted us. Nobody would specially check on a carrier unit pilot's background after all.)

Ted Cherenkov's said unabashedly from the other side of the communicator monitor. His 50-year-old face that was tanned by playing golf looked to be a standard sample for those affiliated to the Senate Council. There were all sorts of medals on his secondary

uniform. *Some great person you are. It's right for you to be lazy to check after all.* Riddhe suppressed the voice within his heart as he answered with a cold voice, "Yes…"

(I did hear news that you were deployed to Londo Bell. But I didn't expect that you'll be assigned to the Nahel Argama. Your reassignment order will be sent over, so just get away from there. A prince of a senator shouldn't be involved in a secret mission.)

The Admiral said casually as if he wanted someone to return home due to bad weather. Riddhe however was not shocked by this line that was without consideration about the current situation . He already expected it when he was called to this second communication room after the supply ship "Alaska" was docked with it. This was the reply he got when he sent the mail on behest of the captain before the battle against the Red Comet. His father exerted pressure to save the foolish and reckless prodigal son—not considering about his son's feelings as he wanted to draw a clear line from this 'family'. Riddhe had his own life, but his father did not care that his son had some things he would not give up when it came to Life.

It's always like this. Dad always has a wide vision, always asking me to see the big picture, and yet won't understand the world his own son sees. The one correct is always dad, and he'll use power to override everything despite it being a mistake. Admiral Ted's lips resembled that of Riddhe's own father, causing him to give a stare at the monitor without backing off. *I have to fulfill a duty and responsibility as someone involved—* He recalled the words the girl said half a day ago as he spoke "Thank you for your kind intentions, but I'm still a pilot of the Nahel Argama."

"This has nothing to do with whose son I am. Right now, the squad's worn out due to continuous battles. As a Federation soldier, if I leave the ship like this…"

(We've sent reinforcements. Just swap over with them.)

Admiral Ted's answer was completely listless as he completely lacked attention to this conversation…or rather, this admiral might not have thought of him as a person. He was just looking at the shadow behind his back—the authority of Senator Ronan Marcenas. Riddhe felt the emptiness of talking to a wall as he yelled, "WHY ONLY ME…!" but Admiral Ted remained unmoved as he said formally, (It's not just you.)

(We'll be taking back the civilians from "Industrial 7", and the prisoner from Neo Zeon, of course.)

"Are you talking about… Mineva Zabi?"

(I'm talking about the prisoner. Don't say that taboo name so easily.)

For once, Admiral Ted showed nervousness in his eyes as he said with a stiff voice. Mineva Zabi herself was not to be disclosed, and her existence was deemed 'political'. The girl's voice rang in Riddhe's mind again, rendering him speechless. Admiral Ted coughed to create a short pause, and continued, (Anyway, these people will be sent to the Moon. You'll follow them too.)

(There're people from the Intelligence Department on the " Alaska", so leave the prisoner to them. Don't ask any further.)

"Then what about the civilians? They…"

(Will be treated as those who violated confidentiality and dealt as appropriate. You have no need to be involved with them)

Violated confidentiality. This unfamiliar term caused Riddhe's heart to cool down. The mobile suit maniac Takuya and that mysteriously bewitching girl Micott could not be isolated from ' politics' any longer. *What will happen to them once they're moved to the Moon?* Riddhe understood that the Nahel Argama's directions and everything else was going just as Mineva descrived. He clenched his fists on his knees. Ted lowered his stare slightly and said somewhat awkwardly, (It's because of your father that I'm talking to you like this.)

(You're still young. Forget about everything you saw or heard there. From now on, this is the world of politics.)

Even if you're the son of a political maestro, this thing isn't at a level where a pilot can resist—the Admiral's expression showed this. *That's right.* Riddhe muttered. He knew, physiologically, that this mentality should not exist in his body that was no longer in the teens. *As someone who has to fulfill his duty and responsibility—I have to do something I can and what I must do.* He had determination that was about to take shape, and lifted his head as he said, "Please just tell me one thing."

"Where will the Nahel Argama go after this?"

Hm. Ted sighed as he raised his loose chin.

Part 9

""Palau", the civilian resource satellite that belonged to Side 6. The Intelligence Branch concluded that the RX-0 was transported here."

Alberto smirked as he handed the monitor sheets to them, looking at their expressions. Otto Mitas gave a meaningful look as he pulled up the uniform cap that was worn below his stare, and took up one of the monitor sheets on the table.

The B4 sized monitor sheet that felt like film showed the exterior image of "Palau". It was a middle-sized quarry satellite located on L1, and could be described as floating in the outer regions of the shoal space region. Another monitor sheet showed the colony association's internal plans, while another one showed the actual internal construct from the observations—the locations of the military port, the number of ships docked there, the types, and even where the command post was—all described in 3D CG details. No matter what anyone thought, this was not data that could be obtained within a mere two days.

"The conclusion sure came fast…"

Otto said these sarcastic words as he put the monitor sheet that had changed back to its original size back on the table. *You're saying that this is the data obtained from optical observation tracking of the enemy ships? What a joke. The Senate Council definitely knew of this base the "Sleeves" have, for years even. The government already knew that Neo Zeon was recuperating in "Palau" ever since "Char's*

Counterattack" ended 3 years ago. It's already there, but politically, it's just treated as a Zeon remnant base that they couldn't see—and the reason why they can see it is because of a more powerful political force called the Laplace Box taking effect.

"This is the results obtained from the military and the Intelligence Branch. This shows that they do feel this operation rather seriously."

Alberto said while ignoring these snide remarks. *I really can't tell whether this man understands that his actions already caused the RX-0 to be lost.* Otto was not the only one who thought this way as all the main cadres in the officers' room were surrounding the long table as they thought this way, but the fat face of this commanding subordinate in a suit showed no signs of wavering. Everyone was giving looks of suspicion and hatred at Alberto, and the " impossible" line came from the chief operator, sparking a debate.

"You want to use the Nahel Argama, one ship, to take down a base? This requires a fleet to do so."

"The ones leading the attack is ECOAS. As everyone knows, the reinforcements for this operation have arrived. It's unprecedented for the ECOAS, who can take many on their own, to send 2 squads to fight together…"

"Where are the other ships? The Nahel Argama isn't going to endure another battle like this."

"Do we have a chance of winning? If we want to get back the RX-0, we can't just suppress from the outside. It's imperative that

we do some mass destruction to prevent the enemy from attacking us."

"We can only land and attack once the ship's forces surround and fire. We only have 5 mobile suits, including the reinforcements . We need to go all out just to defend a ship, let alone support ECOAS."

The well-experienced navigation officer finished, and everyone stared at the Captain who was sitting at a higher level. He emphasized his tone, "Are you convinced, Captain?" causing Otto, who had his arms folded, to jerk.

"Things have already passed the extents the counter terrorist laws have. If we really want to attack the base, we need to gather everyone from Londo Bell. I think the Senate Council is just asking us to die in battle."

"We haven't even mourned for those died in battle…"

The eyes that were bloodshot with rage and fatigue were looking back at him with the uniform cap. Otto felt that it was reasonable for everyone's attitude to be like this as he looked down and would not face any other stare. The Nahel Argama would be fighting alone in this operation to reclaim the RX-0. Otto had never heard of such an unreasonable order in his entire space military career. It was bad enough that they lacked fighting resources, and at this point, many of the ships they asked for were being used for training–just like how the Nahel Argama was a few days ago. The reason why the ships were not gathered was because the Senate Council was not willing to bring matters to the

surface, and such political considerations had no relations to the worn out crew.

"Because of this, we invested a large sum of money training two squads of special forces."

Alberto continued while maintaining his usual iron-wall like thick-skinned face, "We've already sent in as much manpower under this secret mission. Please don't forget that this is the result of the backhand dealings our Anaheim Electronics here has done."

"NO ONE'S ASKING YOU ANYTHING!?"

"IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU THAT THE RX-0 GOT TAKEN!"

The thoroughly incensed cadres all stared over at Alberto, and the subordinates behind him froze up. Alberto hesitated as he tried to speak up, "It's because of me that this ship wasn't ship…" But Otto immediately got off his seat to interrupt him.

Everyone, who had been looking at each other, turned their stare on Otto, causing the atmosphere in the room to tense up. Otto took the shocked and expectant stares, and lowered his cap below his sights and said "I'll be back immediately." before leaving.

He walked out of the officers' room while bearing the awkward atmosphere that did not allow for any depressed emotions. "Is he going to complain to HQ?" "He's going to the toilet, isn't he?" The cadres chattered, yet they sounded so shrill to Otto.

Part 10

Otto moved to the corridor of the gravity block, and took the elevator. There was still a while before the swap of duties happened, so not a lot of people who would use the elevator. He checked the time, closed the elevator doors, did not touch the operator panels, and merely took a deep breath through his nose and roared,

"DAMN IT!"

This roar that rose up from his abdomen rocked the inner walls of the elevator. The voice was so loud that anyone would feel that it could pass through the shaft leading to the bridge and seep out of the Nahel Argama, which was moving in the middle of space. Otto could not contain the smoldering bitterness within him, and could not feel relieved, so he continued to kick the wall with all he had and punch it. The blunt impact sounds rocked the elevator several times, stopping at the cramped box that had no openings.

What reinforcements? What secret operation? Those guys from the Senate Council never believed that this operation will succeed. They're just pretending to do something to help create an excuse for their failures. The "Nahel Argama" and ECOAS are just being used to create alibis for them. We're being used by the government as tools to show that they 'did their best here.

It was too idealistic to say that everyone was being sent to their deaths here. The Box, and Mineva Zabi; this ship kept getting involved in troublesome situations, such that they might as well just sink it. If the crew survive…the captain would just be

reassigned somewhere else, and the crew will be broken up through other means, scattered all over the place and live the rest of their lives while being observed. Even if they complain that they were being punished unjustly, nobody would listen to them. If Neo Zeon had the Box and attacks them furiously, things would change. But to the big shots, they would be very satisfied with an outcome that meets their expectations, and it was unlikely that they would think that far ahead. They would try to prevent an all-out conflict and maintain an economic standard that was based on military reinstatement. Londo Bell would head the other way while hunting down the remnants of Zeon, those on the other side would use a political adjustment 'crisis' to keep acting—

They could no longer hope for the assistance of Senator Marcenas. If they disobeyed and escaped, things would not change . Otto wanted to just break up from the Senate Council itself and surrender to Neo Zeon, but he could not allow himself to do this as he was a captain who had many subordinates die under him. He continued to search his mind that was being cornered, and let his emotions explode in the elevator. At this moment, the elevator door opened, causing Otto to miss as his body tumbled outself.

The two figures stood outside the elevator, showing shocked expressions. Otto immediately grabbed onto the door and barely managed to avoid tumbling to the floor, but his heart felt despair again after seeing their faces. He hurriedly picked himself up, kept still, quickly tidied himself up, and coughed first to clear things up .

First Officer Liam and Commander Daguza blinked for just a moment as they stepped forward in unison, probably pretending

not to see the captain's shameful act in order to save his dignity. *To be seen by these two of all people.* Otto cringed back as he felt his fingertips turn red. He tried to return back to the officers' room, but Liam called out 'captain', causing him to stop.

"I heard of the order from the Senate Council. What do you intend to do?"

Liam raised her thick eyelids as she stared at Otto, but it was a rare sight for Daguza to stand by both of them in common agreement, giving a usual machine-like poker face. Otto wondered what else they would think of as he answered with a low voice, " What else can we do?"

"An order's an order. We can only follow it. This has something to do with the Box that decides the Fate of the world after all."

Otto really wanted to leave the scene this time as he fully comprehended the irony he would be enacting, "I have no disagreements with this." but Daguza's voice caught up with Otto, causing him to stop.

"But we'll view this operation as a hostage rescue."

These unexpected words caused Otto to show an unexpected expression to Daguza behind him, "Hostage rescue…?" Otto repeated, and remembered the face of the boy who rode the " Gundam" and rushed out of the ship. Banagher Links shook of the pressure the adults bore on him and only cared about fighting it head on. Daguza showed an affirmative expression to Liam, and took one step closer to Otto.

"We still owe him one. We'll do what we can do. I remember this ship has a hyper-mega particle cannon, right?"

Liam stood beside the sincere looking Daguza, and nodded with a determined expression that was never seen before. Otto turned towards them completely, indicating that he was willing to listen to them.

Part 11

The Universal Century was about to reach the 100-year mark at this moment, but humanity still did not find a way to control gravity. The generation of centrifuge force within the inner walls of the large rotating domess was the maximum they could go with the current limits of technology. In this sense, humanity were creatures who had not progressed at all since the old century.

It was necessary to insert a rotating domes inside the satellite if they wanted to build a living environment in the mining satellite, and "Palau" was no exception to this. The inside of the asteroid had a domes 1.6km in diameter and 3km long buried inside, and the living space for civilians was built inside. Amongst the 4 connecting stone blocks, the largest of them was the triangular shaped asteroid Calyx, which had two living areas inside. No matter which world they were at, there was a difference in class. If there was an Uppertown with a Government House as center, the other living block would naturally be the Downtown where the miners were, and people were divided in these two areas based on

their statuses. On a side note, the 3 blocks connected to the "Calyx" were called "Corolla", each designated as A, B, C. It could be said that the 3 blocks that were connected were shaped like a flower.

There was no difference in the construct between the Uppertown and the Downtown, but "Palau" had its own unique characteristic. In other words, there was a cutter drill installed at the tip of the dome that could create a centrifuge force and dig into the asteroid's bedrock. It would be apt to describe it as a large shield machine.

The residents of "Palau" built their homes in this very large cutter machine and built towns, forming their social quarters. When the men head out to excavate at the main shaft, the women would stay behind to choose the rocks that were dug or make homemade goods to pass the day. This would be said to be type of life where they do their jobs to the extreme—no, it should be more accurate to say that they were recreating the tough life of being a pioneer. When the Space Migration plan was started, the ones who were sent to work on this asteroid were mostly criminals, refugees or political criminals who opposed the government. They were not allowed to return back to Earth, and could only raise their children under such harsh conditions and end their careers while covered in dust…

"Well, there seemed to be some pulmonary disease or social caste discrimination before, stuff that were really suited for proletariat education. But that's during our grandfathers' time. Right now, they're schools, hospitals around, and even the latest

information can be obtained. We're free to head to other colonies too. Some are still poor but the rest aren't any different from the other places either."

Gilboa said carefully, but he did not forget to quip in at the end, "But discrimination itself hasn't disappeared." At this point, the shield machine was not working, and it was said that most of the men were working outside to support the expenses of their families. Banagher was brought to this Downtown residential block after he met Frontal, and simply stepped into this town called "Palau" that gave a certain carefree vibe. The place was 1.6km in diameter, and the length was half of an ordinary colony. The width was similar to the "Snail", but this place was just like " Industrial 7" in that it was built such that the artificial sun would spin and let out sun rays, so it did not feel as packed as a miniature garden. The sky had brown clouds floating on it, and green pastures could be seen all over the winner wall. However, what felt mysterious was that one part of the airtight wall was covered with a rocky layer.

In any ordinary colony, the airtight walls located on both sides of the dome would generate dirt, creating a scene that they would call a 'hill', but this scene was different from them. The front end of this living block was the cutter drill that was inserted into the asteroid. This machine had not been used for many years, and became one with the ground. The 1.6km long cutter managed to drill into the rocky surface, and that scene was different from an ordinary colony. The shield machine created a sense of pressure that could not be removed, and the crudely made unit houses in the town helped to sight, creating the impression that the entire town was a worker dormitory.

The poor citizens managed to make ends meet by relying on the Neo Zeon army. Banagher recalled the overly glamorous constructs in the command post, and created the impression of dejected looking people in his heart. However, this was overturned the moment he reached his destination.

"Ah, it's daddy!" "Daddy's back!" Such excited voices could be heard once he opened the door, and Gilboa opened his arms wide as he greeted them "Oi, kiddos!" With the boy who was about 10 years old leading the pack, there were 4…no, 5 children, wearing tattered clothes that looked like they were going to be torn apart. These children came running out from the shadows of the old furniture, looking like a pack of mice that were kept and bred. As Banagher gave a puzzled look, another voice rang, "Big Sis Marida 's here too!", and a 6th girl came running out from under the table.

The children that were gathered around Gilboa then leapt towards Marida behind him, "Oi oi oi, you prefer her to daddy here? How depressing!" The children ignored Gilboa who remarked this wryly as they hugged Marida's legs and started climbing up her. Marida herself kept the usual non-smiling expression on her face as she pulled aside a child clinging onto her and grabbed another on the ankle, making them upside down. Banagher felt that this was too violent, but to the children, this looked rather fun as a black little girl squealed "I want it too!" "Me too!" another child's voice could be heard.

What exactly is going on here? The rising dust blurred Banagher's vision, but he continued to stare inquisitively into this neat and tidy room. A lady then spoke up, "You're back. Are you and

Marida hurt?" causing him to blink. A black woman who looked to be in her late thirties showed her face from a rusted pillar. Gilboa raised his hand, causing the peaceful looking housewife to smile brightly as she stepped on the creaking floor and moved towards him. "Captain too." That woman said as she looked over, and Banagher too looked back. Zinnerman was standing outside the door, looking rather shy as he raised his head.

Marida did not look at Banagher any further as she silently carried the children upside down. Banagher was more affected by how she showed a gentle expression for the first time rather than the abnormal arm strength. Zinnerman then turned around and said, "I'll leave it to you then." before leaving from the corridor. " Where's this kid from?" the woman asked as she looked at Banagher, who heard Gilboa's answer, "We have to take care of this kid for the time being because of some reasons." Banagher inadvertently stepped on the floor and left the scene, and though his feet were slowed by the dust blown onto the ground, "Captain …Mr Zinnerman!" he called out to the back silhouette that was gradually moving away.

Zinnerman, who was dressed in a black military leather coat, stood in the middle of the roaring winds as he stopped. The blond man called Flaste too stopped, giving a somewhat menacing look at Banagher, but Banagher did not have the mind to care about him. He stood on the street that was surrounded by unit houses like Gilboa's house on both sides, and faced Zinnerman's black eyes.

"What's going on? Bringing me to such a place…"

"We can't find any other suitable places. As you see, they're kids in there, but there's still enough space to let you live there…"

"That's not what I'm saying…! Why am I not in a cell or something?"

"Do you feel that's better?"

And just like the first time they met, he gave a stare of killing intent to Banagher, "This is just a makeshift, right?" Banagher showed his stumped expression to them and said.

"Are you saying that poverty and discrimination will breed terrorists? Even if you let me see this and make me one of your allies…"

A sharp and hot pain struck Banagher's face, causing his sights to spin. *I got punched.* Banagher understood this as his body flew to the floor, and his face soon landed on the dusty ground.

"Don't be mistaken."

Zinnerman used his other hand to cup the fist that he rewarded Banagher with as he said with a deep voice. Banagher caught sight of that face in his blurred sights.

"Don't think you'll be forgiven for anything just because you're a kid. Adults are more violent then what you know."

These words struck Banagher's sub-consciousness right on the mark as his numb and hurting face was burning with shame. He used his fingertips to wipe away with the blood on his lips, and wordlessly stared at the back of Zinnerman's face.

"You just think you know, but you don't know anything at all. Stay here and learn."

Zinnerman left these words behind as he walked off again. He was not concerned about Flaste, who glanced back at Banagher once, and put his hands into his large coat pockets and left gradually. Banagher spat out the sand that was mixed with blood in his mouth, and finally managed to straighten his swaying knees. *He tells me to learn here, but what?* He mused in his heart and used his hand to touch the heat on his face. At this moment, a voice came from behind, "I was told this before."

Marida suddenly appeared, dressed in the crimson red uniform as she stood behind Banagher. Her eyes looked past him, staring at Zinnerman who was about to disappear at the alleys. Banagher saw Marida's somewhat depressed looking eyes and wondered, *What kind of relationship to they have…Banagher thought of the guess he had before, only to cringe as he heard the voices "Bye bye!" "See you!". 3 children came running out from Gilboa's house and ran towards the front yard that was so small in space that even an electric car could not stop there.*

Banagher looked back at them, and found that the trio's skin colors were different. He realized that they seemed to be children who came from nearby to play, and a girl with her hair tied said, "

Will you be here tomorrow, Big Sis Marida?" Banagher looked over at her, who answered, "Yeah, I'll be here." She answered, and the girl's face immediately showed absolutely delight as she looked at the children around her with a shy expression. "Then, see you tomorrow." "Bye bye." The children left their energetic voices behind as they ran through the alleys like a gust of wind.

Marida gently raised her hand as she watched them leave, and once the children vanished, she looked at Banagher with a cold expression. "Go in. The nights in "Palau" end early." She quickly finished, and left Banagher aside as she went straight back to Gilboa's house. He stared at her long hair that swayed with the wind, looked back at the artificial sun that was definitely turning dark, and finally looked at the street that was about to be buried in sand. Banagher felt like he could immediately escape from here… but he did not know how to head to the port, and did not feel that he could snatch the "Unicorn" back easily. Marida and everyone else could walk about in their uniforms, and this showed that this was a land where all the residents here followed Neo Zeon. No matter where he ran, things would not change, and he would be brought back here in the end.

So, I'm still being restrained? Banagher sighed slightly as he looked up at the 'hill' from past several low-rise houses. The long and large cutter of the shield machine extended right into the tip, making the 'hill' look like it was a material supporting the airtight wall from the inside. The 'hill' had gust of dusts blowing all over it , different from the colonies Banagher had been seeing, let alone a tree. However, he could only look up and this rocky layer that was

completely bare. There was a brown dust-colored mist floating near the axis that could not interfere with the center of axis, giving a mysterious presence that could not be approached.

There's no universe over there, just a thick layer of compressed rock gathered after millions of years. Banagher thought as he felt that the chances of him escaping was getting slimmer and slimmer, and stopped looking at the 'hill'. Out of options, he intended to head back to Gilboa's house, only to notice a stare coming from the alley . It was the girl with tied hair who greeted Marida before, staring at Banagher with wide black eyes.

His eyes met hers, and she bared her teeth that had missing incisors as she made a face before running off. *The citizens here are all soldiers…is it?* Banagher rubbed his face that was punched and walked back to the corridor.

Part 12

Despite reducing 3 people from 6, there was still 3 of them. The 3 children, the Gilboa couple, Banagher and Marida made it so packed that they had to watch out from each other when they move in such a narrow place. There might not be a need to think about this too much when the children were running around, but they had to be carefully when they pull their chairs or do something else.

Some, like Gilboa, had their rooms in "Palau", but most of the crew, including Flaste, stayed in the dormitory at the port, and it was said that Zinnerman would not leave the "Garencieres" even when docked. It seemed that Marida lived at Gilboa's house, and

there was a bed for her at the children's room on the second floor. However, according to the mother, Marida would not spent more than 5 days living there during a month.

"I was requested by the Captain there. That man's in his fifties, and the rest are mostly singles, so he can't just leave a girl like Marida to them. She's been living here for almost 2 years. I do feel that she can live on her own, but the kids keep sticking to her. It doesn't matter if I do so in the first place."

Gilboa's wife said this as she prepared dinner without anyone asking her. *What does it mean when she says that Marida can't be alone ? Is Marida a prisoner here too? Stay here and learn. I was told this before*—the words Banagher heard before suddenly bore weight, causing Banagher to glance secretly and Marida who was accompanying the children, but he did not want to ask her. *There's no need to know. She's different from me.* He told his mind that may relax at any time, and silently went through a frustrating moment.

It was finally time for dinner, and the dining table, which took up most of the living space, was laid out with 7 persons' share. It consisted of sautéed rabbit, soup, bread, and a potato salad that was piled up like a hill. The rabbits were reared in "Palau", and they seemed to be the main source of protein for the residents. Ignoring the contents of the dishes alone, the sight of the dinner table in front of Banagher could be said to be majestic. He, who grew up with only his mother, did not know anything about his relatives, and never experienced seeing 7 people's faces at the dining table. Banagher did go to a buffet restaurant when he was studying at AEIC, but never once had he experienced a mood where everyone sat close to each other and ate

The sense that was seemingly unfamiliar and never used before was activated. Banagher's appetite got the better of all other unspeakable feelings within him as he reached for the bread once Gilboa got to the table. At this moment, everyone put their elbows on the table, cupped their hands, and a moment of silence descended upon the dining room.

"Lord, thank you for the meal today."

Gilboa said silently, and his wife and children said "Amen". As Banagher followed them by cupping his hands, the children had already started tucking in. Marida too split her hands casually and took her fork and spoon. Banagher did see this in a move before, but he never expected a family to really pray before handing a meal. He blinked, and reached for the bread again. The extremely hard feeling made him wonder uneasily whether he could eat it.

A gust blew by the streets, causing the windows to rattle, and the pendant light that was weak swayed. If no one adjusted the artificial flow stronger, the sand would probably accumulate on each other. Each dish had a heavy taste, maybe because it was due to their lifestyle that required more manual labor. Banagher silently put the food into his mouth, and suddenly looked at the window that continued to ring.

How many of these families are hearing such winds while gathered around the dinner table quickly—and amongst them, there will be people who will be mourning for those who will never come back and those who will never hear anything. Banagher's mind, which was relaxed because of the food, had these thoughts, and he felt his hand

holding the spoon was giving off sweating. He wiped of the sweat that started appearing on his forehead profusely and tried to gather his concentration on the food. “Are you from the Federation , Big Brother?” One of the children asked as Banagher put the spoonful of soup into his mouth, unable to taste anything at that moment.

The one who spoke was the oldest boy amongst the trio. He continued to give an inquisitive look to Banagher despite Gilboa glaring at him, telling him to eat quietly. As his younger brother and sister lifted their faces to give quizzing looks at him, Banagher glanced at Marida, who continued to move her hands as she had no intent of stopping her meal. He suddenly felt enraged by some unknown thing inside him, pour the tasteless soup into his mouth, “Yeah, that’s right.” and said in a straightforward manner.

“I was dragged over by the people here forcefully.”

Banagher sensed that Gilboa stopped what he was doing, and that his wife was looking over at Banagher, but he had no intent of caring, “Are you a prisoner?” The boy asked, and Banagher answered with a depressed voice, “Maybe.”

“If that’s the case, it’s great that you’re our prisoner. You won’t get food to eat if you’re a prisoner of the Federation. You’ll even get interrogated.”

“Tikva, don’t talk as you eat.” His mother said. Logic told Banagher not to be bothered by him, but it was wasted, “The Federation won’t do that.” Banagher said.

"They will. Daddy told us before that he was a prisoner during the One Year War, and the captain saved him from his detainment. "

This boy called Tikva stared at his father who should be a one and only hero as he continued. Banagher glanced secretly at Gilboa 's weakly chiding expression as he did not intend to continue. Banagher said, "…Maybe such things happened." as he reached for the bread.

"A lot of people had their families and friends killed by Zeon too."

The Gilboa couple stopped again, and the children showed expressions of shock as they looked up. However, Marida did not show a sign of concern on her face as she continued to eat. Banagher stuffed the bread into his mouth. There was no taste. It felt like chewing on sand, and the sour saliva spread in his mind. " It's the same for both. We're fighting a war here." Tikva said as his expression did not show that he was having a meal.

"Zeon's fighting for the independence of Spacenoids. Big Brother, you're a Spacenoid right? Why are you standing on the Federation's side?"

"Tikva, control yourself, or daddy's going to get angry."

Gilboa growled, but Tikva's widened eyes remained unmoved. Banagher swallowed the sponge-like bread and answered him, " Since where is there a just war?"

"Even if anyone says that it's right, the fact that Zeon destroyed colonies and killed a large number of people will never change. Those who're killed won't even have the time to think if it were correct or not. Without knowing, one of these days, they're just… this isn't logical."

That's right, this isn't logical. Zeon's an anomaly. Neo Zeon that destroyed "Industrial 7" is an abnormal terrorist organizations. I naturally have the right to defend myself unconditionally when I face such people who want to take my life like that. I just had the right to do this. That's not killing. I'm not a killer—

Tikva showed a crying look to Gilboa, who glared at Banagher once, but did not say anything as he put the soup into his mouth. *See, you can't say anything else, right?* He grumbled in his heart, only to hear the sound of a chair being moved, causing him to jump up unwittingly.

It was Marida. Banagher thought that she was just getting up from her seat silently, but she left the table, got behind Banagher, grab his jumper collar with a hand, and was dragged out of his own chair without warning.

As Gilboa and the rest stared at this scene in a surprised manner, Marida dragged Banagher to the door with a force that did not allow for any refusal. "What are you doing…?" Banagher groaned as he spent lots of effort trying not to fall as he was dragged out like a leashed dog, and soon, he was brought out of the corridor.

"Wait, Marida…!" The mother said this as she raised her hand to stop her, and her eyes that once glanced at Gilboa looked at the door again. Marida did not look back as she did not open her sealed lips. Finally, Banagher merely saw the faces of the children with widened eyes as the beckoning darkness of the night closed in on his body and surrounded him. The howling of dogs somewhere was covered by the gusts that blew by.

Part 13

Both of them passed through the alleys just like this as they headed of the 'hill'. It was just past 7pm, but the town was in complete silence. The night streets were sparsely covered with street lights, and even the sound of an electric care moving by could not be heard. Only the sounds of utensils clanking and the television sets echoing from every household could be heard softly . The stray cats that had ominous glowing eyes in the shadows crossed the alleys. It was unknown whether those with their lights turned off were already asleep, or that nobody had been living there.

Night in "Palau" certainly came early. *Let go of me. I know. I'll walk on my own.* Banagher, who repeated this many times before he was finally released from Marida's grasp was being prompted by something as he walked in the darkness. *If she wants to kill me, she should have just done so right away. There's no need for her to bright me to a place devoid of people just to finish me off. Maybe she's going to bring me to a prison in the suburbs, just as I want.* Banagher had somewhat defeatist thoughts as he continued to walk on the sandy

ground faster than what was required. Marida did not speak up in the end, and the silent duo just continued down the dim alley just like this.

The town disappeared right behind them, and a wide quarry appeared right in front of them. The rock strata that was grinded by the cutter of the shield machine was chosen at this quarry. Those with minerals would be sent to the factory, while the rock remains would be sent to an airlock outlet with a belt conveyor that sent the rocks to wherever they needed to go. The shield machine cutter had not being used for a long time, and the quarry was littered with rocks and dirt that was dug but not processed, forming a sloped surface with a steep mountain. Marida went near the warning lights, proceeded on, and guided Banagher to a cave that looked like it was drilled through right in the middle of the sloped surface.

Unlike the central excavation connection shafts, this was a cave that was not strengthened with anything like concrete. The realism of the term prison suddenly closed in on Banagher, causing him to look up at the night sky before he reached the cave. The sandy clouds had not dispersed even during the night, and the lights of the stars, and the town lights that were flickering on the other end, could not be seen. Banagher's legs felt fearful as he was unable to move, but he was glared at by Marida, who entered the cave first, and thought that he did not want to be looked down on. He swallowed his saliva and stepped into the cave. It seemed that there was a power source inside as Marida touched the control panel near the entrance, causing the lights inside to light the tunnel .

The icy cold air surrounded Banagher's body, and the sound of the wind blowing by gradually faded. The tunnel showed a gradually downhill path for 20m, and after that, there was a hole that was broken through. Banagher was overwhelmed by the ceiling that was suddenly raised, stumbled a few times as he saw the sight in front of him, and gasped.

The stone pillars that were carved out were spaced out in a certain distance equally, and the ceiling supported by these pillars was in an arch shape. Under the ceiling were two rows of chairs that were rotting and tattered. The 2 rows of 10 chairs were lined up until the end of the cave. The inside of this hollow was even taller, and there were an altar that was almost rotting and a faded red carpet that was covered in dust. There was a podium at the right of the altar for preaching sermons, and on the other side, there was a pedestal used to receive the Holy Spirit. Entrenched deep into the wall on the other end of the hollow was a male figure who was crucified onto the wall—

The things in front were not exceptionally rare. There would be at least one church no matter which colony it was. Children knew that this person called Christ was the origin of Christmas day. Despite it not being as widespread as the old ages, the number of believers could not be described as few. Even non-believers would normally held weddings or funerals in a church. Banagher remembered that a pastor once recited a line from the Bible when his mother's funeral was taking place.

But over here, this was not an orthodox church. The altar, the Holy water font, everything was obviously made from hand. The stained glass on the walls had lights shining in, and there was

work done deep within the cave as it was possible to shine on the figure of the Cross. The fluorescent lights that mimicked the Eucharist Lights were most likely an antique of the old ages. The candle altar and the figure of the Virgin Mary were placed on both the left and right sides of the altar, and it was probably brought over from Earth a long, long time ago.

Those things were the remnants of the old ages…the Gregorian calendar that was also called the age of God. This was a fortress made by the toil, wear and damage on their bodies, the real believers who were stained with blood and tears—Banagher unwittingly walked towards the altar and stared at the silent figure of Christ. Marida quietly approached him and suddenly spoke, "What you said wasn't wrong."

"There's no just war. However, being just alone may not necessary save people."

Marida ignored Banagher, who was staring at her blankly, and looked up at the Cross. Her gloomy navy-blue eyes showed the light of the stained glass at this moment, glowing in a transparent manner.

"This statue was built when this place was still part of the Asteroid Belt. The first batch of space pioneers were those who could not live on Earth, political criminals and people who had no other ways to live. When the Universal Century started, it was said that the Prime Minister said that this was a moment where Humanity would have to say goodbye to the century of Gods, but to these space pioneers, they would need a light they could rely on , especially those who lived in the asteroid belts, where the sunlight was mixed amongst the stars…"

The clear voice rang throughout the chapel, gradually seeping into Banagher's tense body. He remembered the praying faces of Gilboa and the rest before they had dinner, and tried to say, "Light , is it…" Even though this "Palau" was dragged to be part of the Earth Celestial Sphere, the Church had built up in other places. The ideals of the people who saw light here 100 years ago had not disappeared even till this point. This belief would probably sink in with Gilboa and his descendants from the moment this was ingrained into the asteroid belt. They believed that one of these days, all suffering would pay off—

"Without light, people will be unable to live on. That's why people want to rely on such a thing. However, the people who were abandoned into space finally found a light to replace this man. They found the new light called Zeon."

Marida's expression became a little sinister. Banagher again looked back at the image of Christ, and overlapped the image of Zeon Deikun he saw on the textbook over there.

"Whether it's right or not isn't important. To them, this light is important. They needed something to fight despair and live in this world that was cruel and binding. They needed something to believe that this world still has room for change. No one can laugh at such a demand. It's stupid not to have a physical thing to rely on and live until now—if anyone can say that, that person is either being very happy, or is living in a way where he has nothing to do with the world. That can't be called real living."

Marida clenched her fists tightly as she said this. *This person is letting me see her heart, telling me that if she doesn't do this, she won't be able to tell me something important.* Such an understanding melted Banagher's stiffness, and he felt his wavering heart calm down as he muttered, "Only humans have Gods…" This caused Marida to show an unexpected look as she turned towards him.

"Someone once said this. he said that humans have the power to overcome the current reality…the inner God called Possibilities. "

The words in his memories and the tapestry of the Unicorn were woven together like this, entering the bottom of Banagher's heart. It was not a nightmare, but a voice let out by a definite existence, the one called his father, the words left in his heart—after a short moment of silence, Marida simply said this, " He's really romantic."

"It's impossible for someone to say that without believing in Humanity or the world. I don't know who said that, but he should be a kind person."

Banagher was taken aback by Marida's smiling face, and felt rather happy too. An embarrassed and proud complicated feeling rose up his chest, and he looked up at the image of Christ on the Cross.

Light. The inner God. Something that could be changed into possibilities or hope. Such a thing definitely existed in everyone, and yet varied amongst everyone. That was why everyone would agree with each other sometimes, and fight each other sometimes. If everyone was being wary about what they have different views on, they would restrain their laws and definition of justice, solidifying into an absolute existence and make their way of lives rigid, making mistakes.

At that moment, humans killed Gods. They killed off possibilities and set laws to the world, confining themselves into this fixed viewpoint. They casted aside weights like ethics and morals, and what often kept swaying may be their values. If not, Banagher would not spend time with Marida, who he deemed a " terrorist", and they would not show their inner hearts to each other. Such insistence was foolish, and in a certain sense, regrettable…

Stay here and learn. Zinnerman's words echo in Banagher's mind , causing him to look down onto the sandy floor, and a sigh came out from his heating mind. "Don't mind about Ensign Sergi…that guy you shot down." Marida said as she gently went by Banagher' s shoulder.

"Once you pilot a mobile suit into battle, you're a fighting unit called a pilot. You have no grudges if you're killed, and there's no need to feel guilty about killing people."

Marida's words let Banagher know the significance behind his obstinate actions, and the thoughts that were hidden in his tight heart; they were already seen through. He inadvertently looked up and stared at Marida's face. These were what she wanted to say, and what she experienced and understood. These two factors overlapped within her navy blue eyes, forming an instinct that had yet become a physical form. Banagher's chest felt an icy chill, and he cautiously asked, "Have you piloted a mobile suit before?"

Marida glanced at Banagher silently, and immediately looked away as she simply answered, "I will when there's not enough manpower." This vague sounding answer might make anyone feel a chill, but after a short pause, Banagher thought of an uncertain possibility, and he could only stare at the navy blue eyes that were radiating light.

The light shining in diagonally from the stained glassed caused the side of her face looking at the Cross to look like the Virgin. *Such a beautiful person.* This recognition that only appeared in Banagher's mind at this moment warmed his originally chilly body .

Chapter 2

Part 1

The “Unicorn”s body that was fastened in the spare hangar was an industrial product whose elegance was said to be distilled, and could be described as an art piece. On one hand, it preserved the strokes and the flat surface of a mass product silhouette, while on the other hand, there armor itself was enhanced through a complicated procedure. The lone horn extending out from the forehead showed a remarkable presence of an art piece, and the mysterious appearance which matched the name was granted on the standing giant.

“This high mobility state…or the Gundam mode, I should call it ? When that is activated, a system called the NT-D acts as the OS. As for the Laplace Program, you can imagine it to be activated with the NT-D, and it will reveal some encrypted data in phases.”

The 40-year-old technical officer said as he poked his head out of the abdomen. *Why can’t those who’re so called proficient in technical data talk appropriately to each person’s status?* Angelo felt unhappy inside as he reached for the raised platform and peered through the dim and opened cockpit hatch.

As the backup power was the only thing activated, the all-view monitor was not activated as it remained in the darkness that felt like it was about to converge everything. The display board on the linear seat let out a light indicating standby, flickering a logo that could be read as “La+”. Ever since it fell into Neo Zeon’s hands,

the “Unicorn” kept refusing all external interference and remained silent, and this was the only sign it had been showing. La+—most likely, it was a light indicating the coordinates of the Laplace Box. Angelo felt a chill up his spine, and behind him, Full Frontal spoke , “In phases, you say?”

“In other words, the seal will be undone every time the NT-D is activated, and will show new information. This was activated twice from the pilot was registered. The first time was to let the system get into a standby phase, while the second showed these coordinates, and that’s all. Maybe it’ll show new information the next time it’s activated, and to be honest, I don’t know for sure. However, it’s more natural to assume that there’s still unrevealed information from the percentage of space the Laplace Program occupies the hard disk.”

“You can’t release all the information during this current phase? ”

Frontal quipped. The tall masked figure standing on the raised platform stroked his chin, seemingly showing off alone in this unpleasant maintenance factory. The technical officer did not seem to have slept much after 2 days of nonstop work as he investigated the “Unicorn”, and answered, “We can try.” and weakly dropped his shoulders.

“It already took this much time for us to extract the information that was given. If we randomly try to interfere with it, we might end up causing all the data to be erased. I’ll try if you’re willing to do this, but I won’t recommend this. it’ll be advisable to let it reveal itself according to the process.”

"Can't you remove the pilot's biological register?"

If we can do that, we can extract the information immediately, and there'll be no need to control that boy called Banagher. The technical officer glanced aside at Angelo who interrupted with an anxious voice, and continued to tidy up the large number of cables floating around as he turned his back and answered, "There'll be a risk too. "

"The pilot recognition system is linked to the Laplace Program. When a registered pilot activates the NT-D, the Laplace Program will be able to operate in the next phase. In this sense, we can say that this process is sort of a stepping stone. That's because a special wave is needed to be detected before the NT-D can be activated."

"So that's why it's called the Newtype-Drive system, is it?"

The technical officer gave a meaningfulness opinion, and Frontal gave a response that seemed to indicate that he understood something. *So we can only rely on Banagher Links?* Angelo only managed to understand this and lost all interest in this entire incident as he took a step back from the "Unicorn"s cockpit. The technical officer however continued "Yeah. But even so, its design is still rather amazing." Angelo basically ignored half of his words as he looked over at the wide maintenance factory.

The maintenance factory was located amongst "Palau", formed by 4 asteroids. The largest block was called "Calyx". At this place, the "Unicorn" and more than 20 mobile suits could be seen lined up and undergoing repairs and checks. There was a large thick

green mobile suit “Geara Zulu” standing 2 hangars away from this point. Beside it was a “Geara Doga” that was part of the Geara models, and the machine that had the sleeve emblem on it had its maintenance hatches opened. The long machine standing right in front of it was the “Gaza”-type that was the main fighting force of Neo Zeon in the past. It was a simple mass-production model that was 10 years old, developed from the remnants of the Old republic , but the machines with a transformable frame was not a poor choice in use, and even at this point, it could be used for scouting or investigations. The Sleeve design that was newly imprinted on it showed ingenuity in that they would not realize their weaknesses by using numbers. In this sense, this feeling described the machines fittingly, and it also brought about a sense of unity despite it being a unit of the “Sleeves”.

He looked up at the top, and saw the lights of the ships parked above the glass window at the ceiling. The silhouette that looked to be only the size of a thumb from this point was probably a patrolling “Musaka”-class ship. The military port of “Palau” was designated at the gap formed where the 4 asteroids were linked together, under the mortar-shaped depressions facing each other. The gaps were all covered by the asteroids facing outside, and it was impossible to see the military port from the outside. They could see the lights of the port from some angles, but it was hard to observe from the outside because of the asteroids linked together, giving a net function. Even though, it was not as concealed as a sturdy fortress. If the fissure at this point could be described as an anchorage, the light would be 5km away from this point on the “Calyx” in diameter, while the deepest part would be about 2km away. The fissure itself was protruding at the tip like an

umbrella, and the beauty of the scene observed from below could only be described as majestic. If the connecting shafts could be described as stone pillars, this would be a stalactite cave in space.

Amidst, this large hole, there were 30+ ships docked, and the workboats and mobile suits looked like toys as they were floating through the dock. The randomly assembled remnant organization could be seen basically as a patrol squad, and though there were ships that could not be used as fighting strength, they could assemble enough personnel if they wanted to. *If we can unravel this thing called the Laplace system or something and get hold of the "Box", it 's not impossible for us to wipe out the enemies at one go. But even so* Angelo gritted his teeth as he looked up at the head of the " Unicorn". "I see, we might have to call it a drive, but its nature is a little intense." Frontal's tone caused him to hurriedly look forward.

"Yes. Leaving aside what the people who installed this Laplace Program were thinking, this thing itself is a hunting machine. It can be said that these two kinds of paradoxes were combined together. Captain, the 'madness' you said you felt from it might come from this."

"I understand. Cardeas Vist sure left the Laplace Box to an unbelievable monster to tend to."

Frontal's lips under the mask curled as he heard the technical officer's conclusion. *I missed something important.* Angelo did not even have the time to waver as Frontal called him "Lieutenant Angelo", causing him to get into a still position.

"As what I commanded before, notifying the entire army and follow the instructions."

"Yes!"

At this moment, Angelo instinctively stamped, and then reflected on what he heard. The given instructions were the response to the predicted attack. The Federation would come over to "Palau" to battle. He felt his blood boiling, but also realistically remembered that he had to bring over the freeze-dried rose. He stared at the back of the crimson red figure in front of him. Frontal put his hand on the cockpit hand and asked the technical officer, " So where're the current coordinates pointing to?"

Angelo did not hear the reply of the technical officer who slipped into the cockpit. *That might be the coordinate data of the "Box" , so there's no need for me to hear it.* Angelo intended to peek in through the cockpit, only to be taken aback by Frontal's retreating figure, and could only make a way.

"…I really hope that's a joke."

Frontal faced the glow of the blinking "La+" and smiled as he said. At this, Angelo could only frown.

Part 2

At the same moment, April 12th, 00.25, the supply ship "Alaska " finished the resupply to the Nahel Argama and left the shoal space region as it returned back to the Moon.

The “Alaska” was a support ship under the Columbus class, 145m in length and 110m wide. Its shape could be described as completely rectangular, and though its length was not even two-thirds of the escort Clop-class ships, the ship space it occupied could take up two container block, and its capacity could be said to be sufficient enough to hold a mobile suit squadron. The ship finished its mission, and once passed through a peaceful time as it was commanded to head back under the jurisdiction of the normal Naval Bureau, but at this point, the situation it was involved in was definitely not peaceful.

There were other Clop-classes ships that were escorting it from the moon, and on the way back, the Irish-class sent over from Side 2 joined them. Two Jegan mobile suits were escorting it from the front and back on standby, flickering warning lights. It was expected that there would be escorts when supplying, but this formation was more cautious than even during a battle, and it was a special exception to see more defenses on the way back than it was going forth. The fleet command did not explain much about this, so the crew of the “Alaska” could only feel puzzled by it. However, there were some amongst the cadres who detected that something was up. The fleet command that stated that they found it troublesome to send reinforcements would not just send in escorts on the whim. The issue here was the ‘baggage’ they received from the “Nahel Argama”.

The list of the ‘baggage’ included a pilot who was ordered to return back from the ship and two civilians said to be detained from “Industrial 7”. There was also a prisoner said to be involved with the “Sleeves”, but this person was accompanied with people

from the Central Intelligence Branch, and her name and details were not revealed to the "Alaska"s crew at all. Most likely, the issue was regarding 'her'—*the prisoner in this incident was a girl*, this eyewitness report was spread throughout the ship through the crew. The excessive number of guards was definitely drafted in to escort 'her'. This moving of the prisoner was the main mission of the "Alaska", more important than the resupply to the "Nahel Argama". This was the truth.

Speaking of which, even if they knew of about this, things would not change. If the Intelligence Branch was involved, it would be suicidal to pursue things. The crew would just treat the rumors as such, and it would be fine if they did not reveal their true thoughts until the end of the mission. Even the Captain, who was sitting on his seat at the center of the bridge as he watched the "Nahel Argama" drift far away, had this thought too. The white ship frame shown on the main monitor lost its entire portside catapult deck, and even the ventral fin at the tail was collapsed. It looked like they needed to be repaired in a factory, but the Senate Council ordered them to carry on their mission, and would not even allow them to send back the injured. This was a secret mission being carried out, but the only thing one could assume from this was that they wanted the entire crew to die together.

"I don't know what kind of thing they got, but that ship sure drew the worst straw there…"

The Captain, who had a military career of 28 years, and was still working as an honest supply ship captain while most of his graduated peers from military cadet academy had all become outstanding, had no other feelings about it. This was not

something he should be involved in. Anyone in an organization, whether it was the military, would often have danger around, and he had to face caves he could not avoid. *I just have to hurry back to the Moon and drop the troublesome 'baggage'. As the Captain thought about this, he turned his eyes to the screen, and the alarm rang, ripping through the stable air flowing within the "Alaska".*

"We got a fire alarm coming from the 4th deck! Investigating it immediately."

"The incident happened in the second living quarters. The area is filled with smoke."

The operator immediately shut off the alarm and reported. " What did you say?" The Captain felt his moaning face stiffening as he turned his body to the console on the side of the bridge. The multi-screen monitor that showed the situation inside the bridge was covered in white smoke. The damage control board indicated the location of the report—

"Isn't that the block where the prisoners are held…?"

The second living quarters located inside the ship's gravity block was indicated on the damage board of the "Alaska"s cross-sectional view, and that flickering light was definitely there without a doubt. The Captain yelled out before he even thought about the significance, "ACTIVATE THE EMERGENCY STEERING TEAM!"

"PUT OUT THE FIRE. EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM, GO ENSURE THE PRISONER'S SAFETY…!"

"A new fire's reported! In the first container deck."

A second red alarm followed the voice of the operator, flickering in a corner of container block. A fire was detected there after there was a fire detected at the prisoner block. The Captain was not suspecting whether it was a bogus report or a coincidence anymore as he remained stunned for a while. "What's going on…? " He inadvertently mused, but no one answered as the words of the reports and the term emptiness overlapped each other as they went by his mind.

Part 3

The dome-shaped block that was rotating with the weak gravity generated within the walls required an airlock facility for artificial flow. Under zero gravity, where temperature difference did not exist, the air would not be able to flow easily, and this caused the danger of a vacuum belt in the ship.

The smoke that was created within the gravity block relied on this theory, and it flowed through the ship since the artificial airflow could not be stopped easily, causing the white mist to spread through the entire block. They could have sealed off the partition walls once they evacuated successfully, but the crew, who were all ordinary people, was not agile enough, and 1 minute was already wasted on teaching them the basics countermeasures. The only people who could pull out the Oxygen Breathing Apparatus after detecting this anomaly were most likely the Central Intelligence people who were in charge of watching the prisoner.

The 2 civilians that were also kept within the "Nahel Argama" were left to the crew of the "Alaska" for keeping. The 4 Intelligence Branch officers who were sent over to move the prisoner had already started moving. Two of them were standing in front of the prisoner detention room, while two others went to check on the situation. They did not feel that the enemy's special agents would be able to sneak into the ship, but it was hard to imagine so many fire outbreaks happening at the same time being a coincidence. Two Intelligence Officers were dressed in suits and OBA masks as they kept their wary stares looking down the smoke-filled passages, pulling out their G-17 recoilless automatic pistols. All countermeasures were allowed, with the priority being that their prisoner was to be kept safe. Their guns were pointed at the floor, but their hands were holding onto the safeties of the G-17 , and their expressions were already those of a soldier in battle.

At this moment, the smoke got thicker and thicker, making it harder to ensure their vision. If this was a fire that was deliberately started, the only reason they could think of would be misdirection. *We can't let the prisoner move around so easily, but it would be too late for us to evacuate.* The two Intelligence personnel thought, and a person wearing an officer normal suit appeared on the other side of the smoke. He ignored the duo with their handguns raised as he yelled to them while running, "YOU GUYS, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO WEAR OBAs!" and handed them three normal suits under his armpits.

"Hurry up and put those on. Those inside too."

That person did not wait for their responses as he reached his hand to the detention door with an electric door. The Intelligence

Officers quickly stopped him and said, “We’ll do this.” as they stared at this crew member who seemed to be from the emergency response. The emergency response crew member had the guns pointed at him, but he, who had his helmet pulled down, did not show signs of fear as he roared to the Intelligence Officers with killing intent, “HURRY UP THEN!”

“I’m in charge of fire prevention in this area! It’ll be on me if anyone dies here! Don’t just point that thing around here! Hurry!”

The Intelligence Officers exchanged glances and started putting their feet into their normal suits. One of them continued to remain on watch, while the other put on the helmet nimbly and pulled down the visor. After changing for less than 30 seconds, both of them entered a password only they knew and opened the electronic lock. One of them remained at the door to cover, while the other walked into the detention room.

At this moment, the emergency response member standing beside took action as he touched the Intelligence officer walking into the room by the neck. He pressed the emergency button on the seam of the helmet located at the back of the life support system, causing a status light to flicker. The Intelligence Officer noticed this anomaly and intended to activate the device again, only for the helmet to be filled with a transparent gas.

It was an anesthetic gas used to reduce oxygen consumption to the minimum when floating in space. Of course, this function would not be activated so easily, and it would require many countless procedures before it would be used normally. However, this normal suit that was tinkered with before would release the

gas with the press of a button. The Intelligence Officer was knocked out in 2, 3 seconds, and the other person who noticed this anomaly walked into the room. The emergency crew member however responded before the gun was even pointed at him as he slammed the Intelligence Officer, and reached his hand towards the neck of the opponent who rolled onto the floor.

"You bastard…!" The Intelligence Officer groaned as his face relaxed and his body slumped. The emergency crew member pushed aside the sleeping Officer and tried to get up, staring right into the prisoner's eyes as she stood in a corner of the detention room, dumbfounded. He poked his head outside to check that there was no one else around, and pulled aside his helmet visor.

"Ensign…Riddhe?"

The widened emerald eyes stared at the face deep within the visor. "Put this on." Riddhe Marcenas simply briefed as he handed over the normal suit be brought along to her.

"We're getting out of here. Pull down the visor and follow me."

The prisoner—Mineva Lao Zabi did not say anything unnecessary. Her stared stopped on Riddhe, who was giving a serious look in his eyes, and received the Officer-use normal suit. She heartily took off her purple cape and brought the hefty normal suit onto the slender shoulders with the blouse on without taking too much time. Both of them rushed out of the detention room and passed through the passage with the canister giving off white smoke.

Part 4

They passed through the gravity block and went to the portside container block, also called the first container deck. It was unknown how many gas canisters Riddhe set up at which locations and it was a layer of thin mist once they passed through the air lock. It was unknown where the smoke came from in the wide space that was 100m long and not less than 30m wide and tall. The piled up containers, preparatory goods and the hanging crane arms from above were all covered with a thin veil. It seemed that new air was being switched in, but they probably could not turn off the air flow. The smoke continued to disperse in from the air ducts, and it looked like the damage was spreading.

"If we don't know where the fire's starting from, can't we just turn off the air flow?"

"We should know where the reported area is from, right? What do you mean that you can't detect the heat source!?"

Growls echoed all around as the agitated crew members were scurrying around. If the source was a gas canister, they would not be able to pick up the location through a heat signature sensor. Mineva looked down at the chaos from the catwalk railing, and nearly knocked into Riddhe, who suddenly stopped. Riddhe grabbed her hand and pulled her nearly floating body back. He leaned near the communication panel and picked up the microphone on the deck.

"All hands, prepare for vacuum. We'll now draw away the air on the container deck. Those without normal suits are to evacuate. There's 30 seconds till the hatch is open."

The voice that rang throughout the ship's speakers caused the scattering crew members to stop immediately. The next moment, the black wave of fear started to fill the container deck, and they started moving at a speed several times that of before.

Some leaned towards the lockers with the normal suits inside, some were heading towards the airlock leading to the bridge, leading people in. "Who's the one making that broadcast? I never heard of such a thing!?" "Hurry up and confirm with the bridge!" The officers' voices rang as they fought for the. However, these voices would not be able to calm them down. Mineva saw the figures in normal suits rushing around, and stepped on the floor of this passage on Riddhe's prompting. She grabbed onto Riddhe by the shoulder as he was using the cable gun, and both of them glided past the passage of the container block. They were headed to a space launch on a launching pad. Over there, as the smoke floated around thinly, a green ball-shaped object suddenly appeared from the shadow of the ship, and it rolled its way into Mineva's sights.

"Haro…?"

She unwittingly called out, and people dressed in normal suits appeared behind it as they waved over. One of them waved over at them, while the other carried Haro and watched their surroundings before hiding inside the launch. Mineva did see that

face that was without a helmet on despite her wearing a normal suit. It was Micott Bartsch—*so in that case, the one waving over at us would be Takuya Irei, is it?* Mineva did not have much time to think as the white frame of the space launch was right in front of them, and Mineva followed Riddhe as she reached for the ceiling.

Both of them used inertia to glide to the launch and grabbed onto the open hatch on the portside. Riddhe slipped into the launch first. "Hurry up" a familiar voice could be heard from behind. Mineva got into the space launch together with what looked Takuya in a normal suit.

This space shuttle had been used by the Federation before the One Year War, and there were 4 laser rocket engines installed on the frame that was less than 10m in length. It had a capacity of 10 people excluding the driver. At this point, Micott was sitting on the passenger seat, and she was looking tense and pale as she stared at the steering seat. She met Mineva in the eyes, and looked away awkwardly as she clinged onto Haro on her knees. Mineva felt a sharp pain at the bottom of her stomach as she passed by Micott and moved towards the steering seat in front. The console lights were already indicated, and Riddhe sat on the seat as he did the checks before take-off.

Mineva sat on the co-pilot seat and fastened herself down with the safety belt. She felt pressured by this atmosphere as she got all the way till here. *Are we going to escape using this ship?* This doubt that came way too late spread inside her, but she did not have time to speak up. Takuya closed the hatch, panted and grabbed onto the

back of the pilot seat. “Is the airlock opened enough?” He asked as he stared at Riddhe’s face, who did not stop moving his hands as he continued the checks and answered.

“This kind of space launch can be used as an escape shuttle, so it’s possible for us to access the deck controls from here…those guys have finished evacuating, right?”

Riddhe’s voice caused Takuya to bring his helmet-covered head to the concave canopy window and checked the container deck filled with white smoke. The alarm showed no signs of stopping, but there were no signs of any crew members on the deck. “Looks like it’s over.” Takuya answered, and Riddhe answered, “Alright, let’s go.” and quickly operated on the console. The ‘Air’ flickered on the deck wall, and the warning lights on the floor started spinning for a few seconds. They could feel the continuous alarm sounds fading away rapidly.

The smoke outside the window immediately vanished, and the partition walls in front gradually opened. The large hatch of the pressure room split aside up and down, and the 4-sided space outside the hatch appeared right in front of them. It was the sound of the ship breaking away from the restraints and leaving, and it seemed that Riddhe and the rest were intending to escape from this ship. *Where are they going?* Mineva tried to think, but cringed due to the sudden impact.

A hammer-like sound rang twice, thrice as it rocked the ship, causing bright sparks to scatter all over the place, and the windows were jerking. *Gunshots.* Mineva realized this, and Micott screamed, “THEY’S SHOOTING AT US…!” “Don’t worry, hang

on tight!" Riddhe growled. Mineva looked outside the window, and saw two people in normal suits pointing handguns at them as they approached the space launch. Flares popped out from their muzzles, causing sharp impacts to rocked the shuttle.

"We'll cut the countdown. I'm going to make things rough here. Don't bite your tongue!"

Riddhe spoke so loudly it was not drowned out by the bullets. Mineva looked back in front and held her breath. The space launch rockets ignited at practically the same time, and the G-force that struck from the front surrounded their bodies. The sight of the container deck instantly disappeared from behind, and the vacuum, where neither the Moon or the Earth could be seen, occupied the windows.

The monitor at the back showed the rectangular supply ship, moving further and further away. The pressure of the acceleration on their organs weakened within several seconds, and Micott's heaving sound could be heard from behind. "Alright…!" Takuya shouted with a restrained voice, and Haro's voice rang too "Haro". Mineva too heaved a sigh of relief, but at this moment—

"It's not over yet. There're still mobile suits in the ship."

Riddhe said with a tense voice that never relaxed, and as a result, Mineva continued to look at the monitor behind. The Federation mobile suits escorting the ships were there, and obviously, this space launch would not be able to beat them. If this

heart of the fusion with four limbs floating in vacuum were a fusion core reactor as the heart, the old space launch would be caught be it immediately.

How many seconds passed before the ship grasped the situation and was ordered to pursue us—how much distance can we gain during this time? Mineva and the other three stared at this 5 inch monitor. There was a small light spot the size of a small thumb appearing on the screen with a white trail.

The sensors showed two "RGM-89s" closing in quickly onto the space launcher. They started their pursuit, and they would be caught up in less than 10 seconds. *Do you have a plan?* Mineva intended to ask this as she glanced at the side of Riddhe's face, who was looking intently as he focused on piloting. She suddenly felt the ship shaking, and frantically looked in front again.

A small rock flashed by the canopy window, turning the ship slightly with a small impact. The space debris flew in like bullets, faster than the motion sensors that showed many objects, and this showed that the space launch was moving into the shoal space region. The sizes ranged from pebbles to rocks larger than the launch. Though they were moving through the debris, they could not even slow down by one kilometer relatively. The debris field of past colonies continued to close in on them, moving through the body and floated back. They moved by a large rock, and 100m later, the minute debris that were scattered all over the place covered the ship like a sandstorm. Cracking sounds that bullied the armor caused the launch to tremor unstably.

"Wait, are we really alright?"

"I checked the path. If there's no Minovsky particles scattered, the radar…"

Riddhe answered Micott's shrieking voice and swallowed what he was about to say. He was wondering what was shining in front, only to find that a material the size of a human was rushing right at them. He immediately tilted the launch greatly, and the safety belt was pressed down on their shoulder muscles. Haro slid out of Micott's hands and slammed into the wall, and Takuya cried out, " Is it really alright?" "We won't be able to escape if we just do those cautious things…!" Riddhe answered as he continued to steer. He was already losing focus trying to stare at the settings panel. The sensors would capture the locations of the debris, and he had to use these to find the most suitable escape route. The monitor on the panel showed rectangular blocks entering, all repeating as they formed a 3-dimensional corridor.

The mobile suit pursuers were deliberately slowing down while being wary of the debris, but their speed was still very fast. Both mobile suits used the AMBAC function to dodge around, moving over at a speed the launch could not match. *There's still a little while until the computer calculates the course*— Mineva saw that the navigation setting panel showed a bar that stated the progress, and looked back at the pursuers' positions on the sensors, seeing that they were right in front of them. "Alright. It's here!" Riddhe then yelled and clenched his sweaty fists.

"LET'S GO! GRIT YOUR TEETH!"

At that moment, the 4 laser rocket engines burst out flares, causing the launch to move forward at maximum speed. The hull let out a rattling sound, and everyone was forced down onto the seat. The path calculated by the computer was a complicated route of twists and turns through the debris, and Mineva and company were basically passengers sitting on a roller coaster as they did not know which side was up or down. As Takuya and Micott screamed out, the launch continued to repeat the complicated maneuvers that tested its limits and entered the shoal space region. The sea of debris floated by messily, and the beam a mobile suit fired raced into the flowing starry space, causing the debris that were hit directly to let out lights of explosions.

The scattered debris spurted out from a parallel level, and what sounded like a large number of pebbles being carried tortured their ears. “It’s just to scare us!” Mineva heard Riddhe’s shout as she looked at the large debris floating over from the front. That was the debris of a mirror that brought sunlight to a colony, and the cracked surface floated in the vacuum together. The launch in automatic mode continued to dodge the fragments floating around as it rushed right at the mirror.

“I’m going to do an emergency brake. There’ll be G-force coming from the back. Get ready.”

He stared at the countdown timer indicated on the navigation setting panel and shouted, 4, 3, 2…ignition . Riddhe’s fist slammed onto the console switch, causing the launch that was headed to the mirror to let out its front exhausts to the maximum. The G-force that struck at that moment rendered Mineva breathless.

Everything that was not held in place were flying to the front of the body, and the safety belts stretched out so much they felt like they were going to snap as they quashed into the body. Mineva spent so much effort preventing her eyeballs from popping out as she did not lift her head. After several seconds that felt like eternity, the launch that braked suddenly stopped its reverse jets—and moved in amongst the debris of the mirror. The ship was moving at a relative velocity completely identical to that of the surrounding debris as it slowly floated in space.

Cough. It was unknown who coughed. The launch was dark inside most probably because the engine lights were shut off. Mineva slowly closed her eyes and stared at the sensor image that was the only thing giving off light. The pursuers' markers looked like they were puzzled as they scattered aside. *This launch rushed into the shoal space region at a reckless speed and slammed into debris… whether this sounds crazy or not, it's true that they lost sight of us.* After what seemed like an exceptionally long time, Riddhe said, "Let's go.". Mineva however looked up at the canopy, and could see a pale green machine dragging a trail of thruster jet as it floated through numerous materials.

At this point, no one had the strength to yell out; only sighs of relief could be heard from the gang in this dim launch. Haro, who was bouncing around, finally seemed relaxed as it flapped its ears and asked things like, (Are you alright, Audrey?) This alias that Mineva thought up at the last moment—but was designated onto her during the past few days made her unable to answer as she

merely lowered her eyes. Riddhe glanced at her secretly, and spoke up while trying to end things off, “We’ll spend the time here .”

“Once those guys leave, we’ll take action again.”

Riddhe pushed Haro over to Micott, and removed his helmet while looking like he was avoiding Mineva’s stare. *He’s really an overly empathetic person.* Mineva thought as she asked, “What do you intend to do?”

“We’ll take immediately once we get back onto the Nahel Argama.” Riddhe exchanged looked with Mineva for a while, and continued, “We can still catch up to them at this distance, and once we make contact with them, it’ll be the start of the battle. At that time, the communication channel will be sealed off, so they can’t possible contact the “Alaska”. Logically put, it’s impossible for us to be brought back.”

“And then?”

Mineva did not think that things would improve just by them reaching back onto the Nahel Argama. *Does this man knows what fate will befall on him for taking away a troublesome prisoner like me and stole a military resource to escape?* She took off her helmet, gave a doubtful look, and was shocked by another voice “We can only do that.”.

It was Micott. She lowered her eyes, not daring to look at anyone, and her hands held Haro onto her knees tightly. The backup power was connected at this time, and a red light appeared

inside the launch, revealing Micott's bitter and depressed expression.

"We saw what we shouldn't be seeing, whether it's that Gundam or you, so there's no reason for us to be allowed back home safely, right?"

"Besides, there were a lot of people who died or were deemed missing in that battle at "Industrial 7". We might be counted amongst them at all."

Takuya followed up. *They'll kill people to protect their secrets*— Mineva gave a confirming look to Riddhe, who stuttered "Eh, I don't think things will develop to such an extent so easily…" as he looked up to the canopy.

"But if that were the case, what should we do? Even if we get back onto the Nahel Argama…"

"I already thought of it."

Riddhe was only able to go straight to the point at this moment as he clenched his hands on the control sticks.

"It's a risky gamble, but it's not like it won't work. According to the report I got before I left the "Nahel Argama", it seems that their battle will start before afternoon on the 12th. That'll be the moment when "Palau" is closest to earth."

Mineva did not understand what she just heard. “Battle? Did you just say “Palau”…Mineva asked back, and Riddhe gave her a look while saying, “I hope you can help me.”

“This isn’t simple. I don’t know whether it will be successful, but as long as I meet you, even my father will…”

Riddhe stopped here and looked outside the canopy again. “ Father…your father?” Riddhe said with a forceful tone to block off Mineva’s musing, “It can’t be helped.”

“If this keeps up, everything will be swept under the table. I hope you can entrust your life to me in order to ensure your safety, and these two’s.”

The determined expression on Riddhe’s face as he left the detention room appeared as they landed on Mineva, causing her to look away immediately. No matter what Riddhe was thinking, his expression showed obvious consideration into this decision. She did not feel that she could simply agree to this easily, and as the void of silent time accumulated, Micott’s voice rang in her ears, “ This is to save Banagher too.”

“I know this shouldn’t be something I should be saying. But sorry, I have no intention of apologizing to you. Your army was the one that decimated our colony.”

Micott spoke to Mineva, and suddenly looked down as she clasped her hands that were holding onto Haro. Mineva could only watch the face of this girl who looked more frail than anyone else in this launch silently.

"But I want to apologize to Banagher. If I don't, I…"

The end of her words was vague due to her crying. Micott did not intend to speak up anymore as the silent time descended on the ship again. Riddhe seemed to realize that he was on a path of no return as he gave a determined look; Micott's lowered angry face was trembling with wet eyes; and Takuya could only glance at Micott, wanting to reach his hand to her shoulder, but could not. Everyone's feelings filled this launch, making the air inside hot and hard to breathe, and Mineva was forced to look for a place where she could lay her eyes on in the midst of this starry space with countless debris.

What expanded in front of her eyes was merely a frozen darkness, and she could not find anything to look at. However, the feelings of the people gathered here were running towards a certain place, intending to look for another place. *Maybe I am look for some place I can run to, just like how I was guided by what warm hand. But to where?* Mineva's could not think properly as she closed her eyes and sighed out hot air. *Even if we stay in the darkness, we can't continue on to the next scenario. We have to start running—*

Part 5

"…This is originally an incomplete weapon. The reason why it wasn't removed during the large Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization (FRAM) was simply because of budget issues. We did carry out formal regular activation tests, but we never actually fired for once."

Despite looking tense in front of the Captain, the cannon operator said without hiding his stiff expression. Before Otto could speak up, the gunnery squad leader on standby at the back walked to the front and said,

"Leaving aside the issues regarding the design, I have absolute faith in the maintenance. If you don't mind just one shot, I'll show you how it can hit its target with 120% power.

The well-refined looking muscular body remained still as his energetic voice rang through the power room. *Stop yapping so much* . The cannon operator stared at him with such an expression, not because he was unhappy about how he spoke up while ignoring this officer here, but probably that this gunnery squad leader should not say things he was not confident in. This man's doubting attitude became a fault, and he had the tendency to focus on failures in his heart. "Yes, we'll rely on precision in this battle here. I look forward to your performance." Otto kept his words till this point and just pretended to merely listen to the gunnery squad leader's reliable words. "Yes!", the gunnery squad leader raised his hand to salute and turned right to his workplace.

The cannon operator observed his Captain's expression, and then kicked the floor to return back to his work. The place he was

headed to had a standby battery one would mistake for the ship's main engine, and the gunnery team could be seen carrying out their inspections. The soldiers briskly attached the connecter cables of the backup power source that were so thick they needed to be wrapped around with both arms. In contrast, the cannon operator who was left aside was not that excited. He would occasionally give some instructions, but his volume was never as loud as that of the squad leader. The soldiers were obviously ignoring him as well , "This really can't do." First Officer Liam lamented as she observed this same scene.

"It's good that he's serious, but he lacks a sense of authority. Such words won't be able to move officers."

She stated coldly while her stare under those thick eyelids were looking at the cannon operator. *I didn't expect to have the same view as this troublesome woman I have no relation with.* Otto grimaced secretly as he answered, "Well, it's not unreasonable after all."

"Probably no one thought that we would need to use this to blow some things up one day."

The front end of the energy condenser, 10m in diameter and more than 20m in length, had a mega particle generator that was far larger than normal, a beam generator. The mega particles would accelerate through 8 phases, gather inside the ring, and rise through the cannon that was 18m in diameter and monstrously large. If one included the energy, it would be said that this 'grand cannon' that was 50m in length could not be held inside the ship as it was too big, and could only be kept right under the 1st catapult deck, sticking out from the Nahel Argama from the hull of the ship

. This was of a different class from the 4 main cannons that were designed on the ship. There had been no weapon like this weapon the ship was ferrying, and it was a mega-particle cannon that exceeded common sense—

"In theory, a hyper mega-particle is a weapon that can match the power of a colony laser and can be aimed at a location…but I've never seen it being fired for real once, even though I did see footage of it."

"I'm the same as you as well. I guess the only ones equipped with such monstrously large things are the last generation's "Argama" and this ship, right? We saw it fail in the end during the Neo Zeon War after all."

This hyper mega particle cannon that caused the Captain and First Officer to say this in unison was basically a beam weapon that was an enlarged version of an ordinary mega-particle cannon. It was expected that one shot would be enough to bury a large ship , and if they adjusted the firing angle, it was possible to wipe out an entire fleet. This was basically similar to the large-scale mass killing weapon hanging on a colony frame as a cannon, the colony laser hailed as the ultimate cannon weapon. The problem was that the cost effective was worse off, and one hit would use up all the power on the ship.

They had to transfer all the main power in the ship's main generator to the backup, and in that case, they would not be able to use other mega-particle cannons, and even pilot it. Of course, it did not have a rapid-fire option as the cooldown and reload times were all too long. Thus, there was only one chance of using it in

battle. It was useful during the First Neo Zeon war, at the battle of Axis, where they were using it to break through, but it would not be efficient when it was a ship on ship battle. In this phase, the war against Zeonism was in the purging stage, and a targeted attack assumption here was basically zero, so the Federation army naturally never had the reason or ability to mass produce limited resources, and could not transfer this over to the other ships. If the costs for the FRAM was not ideal, this hyper mega-particle cannon would definitely be scrapped and sent to a war museum. It would be more efficient for them to turn the empty space to contain mobile suits, which would increase their fighting strength. That would be the case.

But in this battle, this monster that was behind times would become the crux. It would become the lynchpin in this battle to reclaim the RX-0—or rather, to save the civilian. Otto recalled Daguza's seemingly ridiculous idea as he stared at the enemy scape, and sighed out all the heavy air from deep within his stomach. Liam reacted fast as she turned her eyes to him, and spoke with a probing voice, "Are you feeling unsatisfied?"

"No, this might be a reckless strategy, but it does make sense. If we want the Nahel Argama to stake on "Palau" alone, there would be no better plan than this. I too hope to save Banagher Links, but if we focus on this too much…"

What could have may never happen. Otto turned to look at Liam, who had this intent in her incomplete words.

"If we want to reclaim the "Unicorn" too, the risks of this operation will increase as such. I'm thinking whether I'm making

our crew risk their lives because of some personal feelings, and I'm still wandering about this."

"In this situation, the only one who can activate the RX-0 is Banagher Links. If we can't save him together with the RX-0, we can't consider ourselves as having reclaimed the "Laplace Box"."

"Though that's true…"

That's just trying to talk our way out of it. Basically, there's no need for us to be at the Senate Council's whim and risk our lives on this mission to retake the "Laplace Box". We do have the option to just fight with the motions and escape with our tails behind our back. Otto continued to stare at the gunnery squad soldiers who were focused on their work, and lowered his stare to the floor. Liam did not say anything as she took out a photo from her officer uniform pocket and stealthily handed it over to Otto.

The photo that was covered with a layer of coated sheet had a 15,16 year old boy there. He looked rather handsome, and that naïve looking expression did look rather similar to Liam. Otto tensed up slightly and asked, "Your kid?" Like usual, Liam answered without smiling and said to him, "Yes. He's going to be 17 this year."

"My husband died in the battle of Solomon, and my mother's taking care of him. It has been more than half a year since I last saw him…"

Liam continued, and looked at the photo, quipping, "He's like my life." and kept it back into her pocket. It was hard to imagine

hearing this line from this person who acted like a woodblock, and Otto could not help but widen his eyes at his First Officer.

"I don't really understand politics, but I told my son that momma's working in the army to carry out justice. I don't think justice will be in this mysterious "Box", but it's another thing trying to save another person. I suppose my son will understand and forgive me even if I can't return home because of this."

Liam said this with a serious face and continued, "I suppose the other crew members are the same too, and kept her mouth shut." That direct attitude of hers and the enigmatic look was something he did not like about his First Officer, but she looked rather affectionate at this point, causing Otto to say "Is that so." And smile.

People will sometimes end up in tough situations, and when they have nowhere else to rely on, they would rely on existences beside them that were like treasures. Otto thought that there was no need for them to give up their life so easily, and at that moment, a short alarm indicating an emergency meeting rang inside the power room.

(We've received an emergency contact from an allied space launch. Captain, First Officer, please head to the Bridge.)

The broadcast that indicated merely the bare minimum caused Liam to change expressions and mutter, "A launch?" It was unexpected to hear an ally contacting them so casualty in this space where there might be enemy ships patrolling. "At this time …!" it was unknown whether the groan came faster as Otto kicked the floor and floated to the power room door. He rushed through

the communication shaft of the cannons department and left the hyper mega-particle cannon area at the hull. He returned back inside the ship, and the elevator leading to the bridge was right in front of him.

Part 6

The elevator door just opened, and Liam entered the bridge at a speed she would never lose to. Otto used his hand to stop Ensign Mihiro who was about to get up, and spoke, “Whose ship is that?”

“Yes. The identification code classified it as a launch from the “ Alaska”, but…”

Mihiro put her hand on the headset, and turned her face that grasped this vague situation to the communication console. The monitor was full of noise, and it was impossible to see the person’s face. As Otto frowned, a familiar voice rang through the voice box, (Can you hear me, Ensign Mihiro?), causing the air sucked into his nostrils.

(We don’t have enough thruster fuel here. Please hurry up and allow us to land. Is Uncle Raccoon there!?)

Raccon. This word itself caused everyone on the bridge to look at Otto. Of course, no Captain would be able to remember the voices of more than 200 crew member, but Otto heard this voice before. He coughed to clear the abnormal air here, and said, “Who are you? Are you a crew member of ours?” ignoring Liam as he picked up the microphone on the console.

(To the launch approaching here, this is the Uncle Raccoon of the "Nahel Argama". Specify the passengers' ranks and names.)

After an awkward pause for about 2, 3 seconds, (Yes, I'm Ensign Riddhe Marcenas of the Nahel Argama mobile suit squad!) a voice came from the speakers. The face of the "prince" he faced several days ago clearly appeared in his mind, making him speechless. "Ensign Riddhe…?" Liam mused as both of them looked at each other, and Otto turned his unfocused stare to the communication monitor that was full of noise.

(I'm approaching the Nahel Argama with 2 civilians here. Please allow me to board.)

"What's going on? What happened with the "Alaska"?"

(I didn't receive any instructions from the "Alaska", but came to the Nahel Argama on my own.)

The atmosphere inside the bridge suddenly tensed up. Otto quickly held onto the microphone and asked Mihiro, "Can we contact the "Alaska"?". Mihiro answered, "We can't. It's impossible if we don't leave the shoal space region." and Otto stared at the launch's current position on the navigation monitor.

If they believed the information the Senate Council sent over, there would be less than 20,000km direct distance to the area the enemy patrols would be at. Otto stared at the monitor that caught sight of the launch, and made the conclusion that it did so despite knowing the consequences, and spoke into the microphone, "Why did you come back?"

(I'm a pilot of the Nahel Argama. I came back because I want to live and die together with the ship.)

"You should understand that this is against military orders, right?"

(I realized it already. Regarding the two civilians, I considered that it might be dangerous to hand them over to the Senate Council like this, so I brought them along.)

"He said they will be in danger…" Mihiro muttered and stared at Otto. These civilian had already known about classified military secrets, and the Senate Council would not just let them head back home so freely. Otto himself did think of this possibility before, but could not answer for certain, causing him to look away awkwardly. Otto exchanged understanding looks to Liam, and in place of doubtful answer, he simply told her to "Allow them to land." and handed the microphone over to Mihiro.

Otto deliberately avoided looking at Mihiro's doubtful look as she took the microphone. "To the approaching launch, our ship will allow you to land. Please match our relative velocity and abide by the deck manager's instructions to enter from the back." Mihiro said this, and Otto had his back turned on her as he again looked up at the visual on the sensor screen. *No matter whether the "Nahel Argama" survives or not, Ensign Riddhe's military career will be at an end. He did such a reckless thing…well, I can say that, but no half-baked determination is going to allow him to use such a small launch to shake off the "Alaska"s detection, pass through the shoal space region full of debris and catch up with us. What prompted him to do this?* Such a doubt started to appear in Otto's mind.

If they just wanted to ensure the safety of two civilians, it would be a weird thing to think of escaping to the "Nahel Argama" preparing for battle. From Riddhe's words of wanting to live and die together with the ship, it's clear that he knew how dangerous the battle that was about to start was. It was logical of him to contact them when communications were sealed off, and obviously, this was not something thought of at the spur of a moment— The indecisive thoughts started creeping up in him, and as the navigation operator asked, "Is this really alright?" Otto was at a loss of words. Liam stepped forward in place of Otto, and said,

"There's still less than six hours before the battle. We can't send them back now anyway. Tell the guards to carry out a thorough check on the launch."

"Captain." Liam added on for confirmation, and the navigation operator gave a believing look as he looked back at the console. *Just ask the person himself.* Otto nodded at Liam, who gave this expression, and looked at the watch.

9.07am. It's definitely less than 6 hours before the first phase of battle at 15.00. Should we view this as a lucky omen, or…

Part 7

The activation switch was pressed, and the low buzzing of the power flow shook the exterior of the machine, and the aged motor sound roared as it spun. The conveyor belt soon started operating, and the gears of the crusher could be heard activated it rattled.

"Amazing!" It moved!" Tikva ignored the cheers of the children as he poured the rocks on the cart onto the conveyor belt. The large fist-sizes rocked would first get crushed by the crusher, and then get polished by grease before being washed by a jet stream of water. The minerals would be stuck on the grease, so they would not be washed away by the water, and the remaining rock scraps would be removed easily here. The chosen pieces of minerals would then be set aside and poured into a bag at the end point.

This machine was set up behind Gilboa's house, in a workshed smaller than a garage, so it was definitely not a large machine. The minerals they could obtain were just a teeny-weeny portion, but to Tikva and the rest, this was an important machine supporting their family income. "How did you do it?" The second son asked with excitement. "The gears had oil stains all over it. I just cleaned them up." Banagher answered as he covered the maintenance hatch of this sorting machine. He used the towel hanging on his neck to wipe away his sweat, and the 4-year-old daughter pointed at him and laughed, "Your face is all black!"

Banagher touched his face, and noticed at the towel was already stained thoroughly by grease. Gilboa's wife seemed to chuckle unwittingly as she said, "You helped us a lot." and handed a new towel over to him.

"It's a lot easier now. I did ask my husband to repair this before, but he would always be busy doing something during the rare times he come back...Tikva, you have to learn from big brother Banagher here. You have to learn how to repair it on your own even if daddy's not around."

"Got it. I saw it and remembered."

Tikva sat down on a barrel of machine oil and answered with a tantrum. There was no reason for a prisoner to teach him…or rather, it could be said the reason why Tikva threw a tantrum was because that at his age, he would resist those who treated him like a child. Banagher inadvertently gave a smile and switched off the power source for the time being. "I'm telling you, mama used this to sort the rocks that can and can't be used!" Banagher patted the young daughter who got over to his side and explained, and looked up at the sky through the roof workshed. The light that shone in through the brown clouds was the artificial sun of "Palau " he got used to seeing after the second day.

During the day, most of the men would head out to the excavation field, while the women would focus on choosing the rocks, or make screws or all sorts of things. The proper quarry plant was located outside the "Palau", and they did everything from refining to molding, so the families' factory produce as a whole was just a small percentage. The rocks inside the rocks storage of the living quarters—all the rocks dug out when the living block round cylinder, the shield machine was working—would be moved out, and one of the work specifics was to sort out these rocks scraps, and in nature, they were just 'family handicraft' where they could only earn so little despite working so hard. The efficiency here was very low compared to the automated system of "Industrial 7" and the machinery here was so old it was reminiscent of the Middle Ages. But the residents of "Palau" had viewed this form of living as a way of life, and spent many days doing so. The reality Banagher himself faced at this point was to kill time by repairing machines.

Marida and Gilboa went out, and the children had to head to school. He was left alone as a prisoner, and had nothing else but time to spend. Banagher went around Gilboa's house randomly, found this faulty machine, and told himself to repair this on Gilboa 's wife request. He borrowed a set of tools that was said to be left behind since Gilboa's grandfather's generation, and wrestled against this installation that could be said to be an antique. It was better than being alone—and even though it was just this level of manual labor, but after hearing the sound of this sorting machine regain its life, and heard the cheers of the children coming back home, Banagher had to admit that he felt a sense of fulfillment he never had before.

No matter who that person was, it was not a bad feeling when someone got thanked by another person. Banagher could feel that he was actually helping someone by doing this, and to him, it was a source of hope that could help him continue to live. *Don't think of any unnecessary things when working. Just focus on the job at hand. What will happen to me after this, and what I'm doing—I don't have to worry about this. It's true that I'm running away from reality, but it's true that I can relax my mind by moving my body and working out some sweat. I never worked seriously on the machines when I studied like an apprentice monk, studying for several hours—or maybe that's because I' m being relied for something?* Banagher recalled Marida's face inside the cave church, and landed his sights on the grease-stained hand. "Where did you learn such things?" Tikva said, and he lifted up his head.

"From school. Anaheim Electronics Industrial College. That's a place to learn how to take care of machines."

"I know Anaheim. It's a company that produces mobile suits, right? The "Geara Zulu" daddy pilots and the Captain's "Sinanju" are made by Anaheim."

Tikva said confidently as he let the toy glider fly. Banagher associated the term 'Captain' with the masked man, and asked back, "The "Sinanju", as in that red mobile suit?"

"Yeah. But the rumors that Neo Zeon stole it were all lies. Anaheim did not want to show that it was helping Neo Zeon, and said that it was stolen."

"…Oh."

Banagher had no other way to answer. Tikva did not allow him to reflect on these words, and asked curiously, "Can I go to that school?"

"Of course…you want to?"

"Yes. Neo Zeon will be willing to use me if I'm familiar with machines, right?"

"But if you join the army too, no one can help your mother."

"Stupid. It's because I want to help mama that I want to join the army. She herself said that we can't survive for long just by working in the quarries. Daddy said that he didn't know when something will happen to him…"

TIkva bit his lips and threw the glider out like he was throwing stones. The anxiety and anger this stubborn child had was thrown out, and the glider could not ride on the wind as it landed right inside the yard. Banagher turned his back around, picked up that toy that resembled the “Homo Avis”, and said, “You’re amazing, Tikva.” as he realized his ignorance. He did not have the right to speak like an adult, but he had no other words to express this form of self-defeat within him.

“But I wonder if things can stop?”

“What can?”

“The war. Whether it’s your dad or Marida, I don’t think they like to fight, right? Both sides got battered, and everyone suffered, so I think it’s about time we should stop.”

“Are you telling us to surrender?” Tikva started to give a disgusted look as he said this. Banagher felt that he said unnecessary things, but continued, “I’m not talking about who wins or lose.”

“What I want to say is whether both sides can back off a little and talk.”

Banagher could not say anything more as he looked at the glider. They had a leader like Mineva who could think, and a soldier like Marida who could control herself. It seemed that such people alone would be able to end the war, but reality kept forcing children like Tikva to consider joining the war, continuing the

situation. This could only be described as reality, and Banagher could do nothing but shamefully admit his ignorance. *Are these the things Zinnerman wants me to 'study'? To understand the current situation, and to realize that what I learnt in this current situation is just knowledge; this original 'knowledge' is to consider what's after this and having the power to change the current trend, and this learning is a process to integrate thought elements.*

The power to change the present, the possibilities—the unfamiliar memories pulsated in his temples as he stared at Tikva's face. Tikva gave a somewhat doubtful look back at him, and started shaking the legs reaching down the oil barrel, patting his retreating head as he said,"…I don't really understand."

"But without war, daddy and the rest will lose their jobs. More people will be without jobs. I'm wondering if that's a bother."

"Now that you say it…"

This time, he really had nothing to say. This was the difference between those involved and those not involved—no, Banagher just felt that his knowledge which had no considerations for others were crushed, and he looked away from Tikva. There wasa saying that knowledge alone would not have power, and this scenario in front of him was a prime example of this. However, his temples kept pulsating, and he in reality could only say child-like words to a child, even though he was merely someone who could not use any useful knowledge…

A sense of shame, and anger, rose up within him. He switched hands to pick up the glider and threw it at Tikva. The glider

became a vent of frustration without an exit as it flew above Tikva' s head, over the short wall outside the house, and disappeared.

"You're bad at it!" Tikva teased. "Sorry, I'll get it back." Banagher said and left the workplace. He heard the singing of the daughter as he passed by the outside of the short wall beside Gilboa's house. The glider with a wing that was about to fall off landed in the midst of a path covered with dust. Banagher was about to pick it up, and detected a shadow moving up to him on the road, darkening his sights.

He looked up, and saw a man he never met before standing there. He had medium build and high, and was wearing dirty work clothes with a hunter's hat. It was obvious that he was like the quarry workers that were often seen, but in the midst of his drunken red face, there was a sense of tension in his eyes. Banagher inadvertently backed away, and the man spoke, "You're Banagher Links, right?", causing him to nod.

"Wait at the 3rd dock of the 14th Space Gate at 6pm. Someone will be there to receive you."

The deep yet fine voice grazed past his ears as it moved by Banagher, and something was stuffed in his hands. Before he recovered, the man had already turned around the corner of the alley, and he could only vaguely see the fluttering of his shirt. " Erm, excuse me…!" But even with that call, the man never responded, and Banagher looked at what was stuffed into his hand .

Two A4-sied monitor sheets were rolled up. One of them was a 3D visual of the "Palau", indicating the full view of the location in a grid format. The other was the actual scene of the space gate, and one would think that it was a crude visual recorded secretly, and the red light that probably designated the location was blinking.

Banagher checked that there was no one else around, and stared at the monitor again. As his face approached the monitor, something dropped onto the floor. Banagher picked up that thing which looked like a ball-point pen, but it was a little heavier. Most likely, it was some small transmitter—this instinct caused Banagher's hairs to stand up, and he could not help but kick the floor.

That man passed through the alley and was about to turn around. Banagher called out to him, "Please wait!" as he tried to catch up with all he had. He grabbed the man, who kept moving, by the shoulder and asked, "What do you mean that someone will come pick me up? Who are you?" The man shrugged his arm off and gave Banagher a sharp expression, saying, "Don't make too much noise."

"Follow these instructions if you don't want to die. This place will become a battlefield immediately."

Banagher gasped, and this man did not let go of this opportunity as he quickly turned around the corner. Banagher frantically followed him, but did not see the man on the road

surrounded by old unit houses on both sides. The man disappeared like a puff of smoke, and the only one there was an old granny with her back arched.

"You say this place will become a battlefield..."

Banagher gripped onto the ball-point pen that felt very heavy, and looked around at the streets that looked rather blurry in the afternoon. The regular sound of the grinder could be heard like a machine gun at this point, and Banagher felt that his feet swaying. *Is it the Federation? Is that man an undercover spy or something? Don't joke around. This is just a pitstop the Neo Zeon Army often use, not some military facility. A spy like this around should know. Why exactly is the Federation here—*

As he thought about this, a jolt shot up his spine. It did not matter where the location was. The Federation had been aiming for the "Laplace Box". They were preparing to take action, just like how it was in "Industrial 7". They wanted to take back the crux of the Box…the "Unicorn". They never cared about anything else, and the reason why they sent a spy over to contact him was to ' take back' the only pilot who could activate the "Unicorn". The Federation was about to arrive. The vicious fangs of violence that gnawed "Industrial 7" to bits would strike "Pala".

The glider slipped out of his hand and silently fell onto the floor . Banagher's left hand, which was holding onto the monitor sheets, was frozen like stone, and his numb right hand picked up the glider as he started running.

First, he had to meet the man he just saw. He wanted to use that man to contact the Federation to tell them to stop the invasion of " Palau". He knew that this definitely could not be done, but he could not stop his running as he ran mindlessly through the narrow alleys with the 'hill' of oxidized rocks as a reference. He ran down to the subway station through his own memory of the previous day. He passed by a cart full of dirt , and after an umpteenth turn, Banagher's head nearly knocked into an oncoming person.

The person stepped aside before Banagher stopped. Banagher barely managed to stop himself from falling, and gasped as he faced the person around the corner.

"What is it? Why are you here?"

Marida was not really taken aback as she asked with a clear voice. "Well…" as Banagher was about to speak up, he met Zinnerman, who was behind Marida, right in the eyes, and immediately hid the monitor sheets behind him.

If I explain everything here, they will tell everything to the entire army. The Federation army will be ambushed, and the man just now will be caught. Riddhe, Mihiro, Daguza, the Captain whose name I didn't manage to remember, the operators, they're not just fighting units called soldiers, but people with flesh and blood; the faces of the "Nahel Argama" crew members appeared in Banagher's mind, causing him to shut up. *Of course, they might not be the ones approaching.*

Since they have such damage, and Daguza and Audrey are on board, it's reasonable to assume that another squad is attacking, but it's not fine even if it's like this—

This thought appeared for a short moment, "Banagher?" as Marida frowned and asked, causing him to recover. He reached out the glider in his right hand and pushed it at Marida. "Erm, please return this to Tikva." and backed away like he was about to trip.

"I'll be back soon. So then."

The siren indicating 3pm rang, "Banagher!" and with Marida's cry behind him, he started sprinting wildly again. *What should I do? What can I do?* The melody of the siren seeped into his mind that was repeating his musing, and the thoughts that could not find any solutions became even more corroded. There were still 3 hours until the operation began. Banagher felt the transmitter in his hand become heavier as his feet never stopped moving, kicking up the dust on the way.

Part 8

"Have they made contact? …No, it's alright. We can leave the mouse alone. That's a disposable spy, so it's impossible for him to get that much information."

The 3pm siren rang. The downtown block would let out an interrupted siren, and the uppertown would have a clear bell chime indicating tea time. This bell was something the man called the superintendent imported from Europe on Earth. Angelo tried

to force himself to listen to this annoying sound that entered his ears, and picked up the ivory carved receiver.

"More importantly, the "Unicorn"s transported as planned, right? …Right. Let it remain at an obvious place. That person will definitely find it."

As expected, there was a doubtful voice from the phone. Angelo turned behind and saw Full Frontal bring the teacup to his lips, and could only exert pressure by saying, "This is the Captain's orders. Don't think of anything unnecessary." And hung up. DING. The antique phone let out a clear crisp sound, mixing into the bell chime that stopped ringing.

"Are your things done, Lieutenant Angelo?"

A somewhat bothersome voice in contrast to the bell chime rang , and Angelo turned his face as he was about to click his tongue. The light rays from the artificial sun shone into the reception room, and the sight of Pepe Meganan's lightly tan smiling was over there .

The large body that accumulated so much fat had a loose Roman styled robe draped all over him, and his perverted looking face was staring at Angelo. This was his ancestor's birthplace—a clothing of the Southern tribes on Earth, but to Angelo, whether it was those dazzling gold large rings or the rings that were piled up on the caterpillar-like fingers, these were just some crude class goods. This was really befitting of the owner of this residence, draped in such luxurious clothing and ignoring temperaments. This was how the superintendent of "Palau" was like.

Such Zeonism believers were a laughing stock, but they could not show any signs of disgust to Pepe, who was a sponsor of the " Sleeves". "Yes, sorry to be rude on the phone!" Angelo answered as courteously as possible and returned back behind Frontal. *Are things progressing as planned?* Angelo nodded at this suspicious-looking stare through the mask, and cleared his expression as he stared at Pepe. "He's rather capable for a young man." The superintendent of "Palau" said with lots of irony.

"With young people like him, I suppose there's hope for Neo Zeon's future, right? Captain Full Frontal?"

"We need supporters like you to establish this line, Superintendent Pepe. Or I wouldn't be so sure."

"No no. Someone like me is just an opportunistic person with this sudden chance. I'll be really honored if I can contribute even a little to the revival of Neo Zeon. Besides, we can reclaim the land robbed from us for generations due to the Forced Migration, and end our ancestors' regrets of living their last days inside the Asteroid Belt.

Pepe continued to chuckle as he gulped down grape wine that were from Burgundy. No matter whether his words were true or not, it was a fact that his ancestors lived their lives developing the Asteroid Belt. He lost his father at an early age due to space radiation, and was forced to spend times of tears with his mother and brothers. Soon after, he became a representative of a labor union that was formed, and while he worked hard to improve the work environment, he skillfully provoked riots and strikes,

managing to establish himself amongst the financial world. During the war especially, Pepe had a tight relation with the Pergamino family who invested heavily in ship repairs, and there were rumors that more than half of the quarry resources used for repairs were resold by Pepe through illegal means. Side 6, which maintained a neutral standpoint at that time, had a large number of floating docks, and so, that meant that as the Pergamino Shipping Company treated both Federation and Zeon forces as its customers, Pepe manipulated the organizations within the Asteroid Belt.

After the war, Pergamino retreated, but Pepe continued to remain in touch with Side 6, and offered some power in regards to the political stability on Side 6. In this sense, Pepe was undoubtedly a bureaucrat supporting Neo Zeon's army, and one could say that he was someone who established himself from the Forced Migration plan, but he was a very ardent supporter. At this point, the passion to improve the work environment in the Asteroid Belt was not like before, and his shameless attitude of sitting on this throne of authority, leeching his labor camp, would remind one of the theory the media talked about, about how 'the political season was over'. After the One Year War and the two Neo Zeon wars, the celestial space thought of gaining independence gradually became a fading yearning, but there were industrial forces trying to brew this sort of thinking. The fighters who tried soft methods in the past pulled back from the battle, and ended up squeezing out from the grassroots, creating an Earth Celestial Sphere where no one cared about.

To Pepe, the assistance to the "Sleeves" was just a form a investment, and the military understood that he was one of the

culprits making things complicated in military affairs. Angelo did not feel that Pepe was someone worthy of being heavily involved in the revival of Neo Zeon, and could not even let down his guard. Pepe said, “But as the person entrusting “Palau”s safety to you, I have a minimum request.” causing Angelo to raise his eyebrows slightly.

“I’ll be especially bothered if you don’t notify me of an incident like what happened to “Industrial 7”. Besides, I have to consider the pride of Side 6.”

“As I had just said, that was not expected. I’m really grateful for your utmost support, Superintendent Pepe, but we can’t notify you regarding all the military matters.”

“I understand. Just notify me about these random stuff like usual. I have no intent of nitpicking the military’s actions.”

Pepe gave a diplomatic tone in response to Frontal’s answer as expected. *How much does this man understand regarding the “Laplace Box”?* As Angelo thought about this, Pepe’s eyes narrowed slightly , and spoke in a direct and fatal voice.

“Speaking of which, I’m still wondering about Her Highness Mineva’s illness. Has she still not recovered?”

This was an irritating point about this man. Despite living in this life of extreme luxury, he never lost his instincts as an investor. “I’m sorry, but she’ll come and greet you when she has time. I think she’s showing fatigue from having to hide from people for a long time.” Angelo heard Frontal’s machine-like voice as he stared

at Pepe. “Is that so? I do visit a family doctor often. Please notify me if the illness persists.” Pepe said while giving a certain look that Mineva herself was not around.

“The revival star of Zeon has to be around. You may have built up this current Neo Zeon army…the army organization “Sleeves” that caused terror in the Federation, but the center of this organization is directed by Her Highness Mineva.”

Pepe lit the cigar in his mouth and slowly stood up. “It’s because of the Zabi’s inheritance that what couldn’t be fulfilled can be fulfilled, and we managed to continue doing things that wouldn ’t work till now. But if Her Highness Mineva keeps shying away from people, we may have to reconsider.”

Pepe said these threatening words as he glanced aside at Angelo, who unwittingly clenched his fist. Right in front of him, Frontal answered, “We’ll take note of that.” as he continued to put on a stone cold mask on his face. Pepe’s fat lips tilted slightly, and looked through the wall window, down at the courtyard of his residence.

“Even so, a symbol is still a symbol. What the soldiers are seeing is you, the Second Coming of the Red Comet. You’re the one standing on the frontlines, waving the flag, and the organization’s able to gain the strength of unity and implementing …no, I suppose this is just my business sense at work.”

“It’s the same in the army.”

"That's right, isn't it? That's why this current Neo Zeon army is so strong. However, it's not easy to see this from the outside. Zeon will never get a real revival if it can't gain the support of everyone in the Earth Celestial Sphere. I'm a believer in the old Republic army, but the fact is that many foolish people would reject the Zabi name. in that sense, there might be limitations in having Her Highness Mineva as the center of this organization."

"May I know what are you trying to imply, superintendent?"

"I said it before, didn't I? I'm just an investor, a businessman. I just feel that if the one I'm investing in has a seed that can sprouting rapidly hidden within, I'll try to let it bloom even if it's not of my personal preference…Char Aznable."

This voice sounded neither like a confession nor a call. Frontal ignored Angelo, who inadvertently looked back, and continued to look forward with an unmoved face.

"Alternatively, Casval Deikun. As the orphaned son of Zeon Deikun, I hope that it's possible to remove the mask and show up in front of everyone again…I'm not the only one to hope for this."

Pepe's back faced the fountain in the yard as he exhaled smoke deeply. *So he stated Mineva's absence as a prelude to this conversation?* Angelo understood this and waited for the response of the masked man called "The Second Coming of Char", whether he would take off the mask and reclaim the throne of Zeon's revival—after

several seconds of silence, Frontal said, "Char Aznable is a man who lost." and on hearing that, Pepe's trembling face was reflected on the window.

"And he's a dead man. The reason why I put on this mask is because I know that death made Char's name a legend. Thus, I'm just playing a role. I have no interest in whether he's alive or not."

"Then, you don't have any intent to remove that mask in the end, is that right?"

"I don't feel there's a need to do so."

In front of you, that is. Angelo seemed to hear a voice that added on to the meaning to these words. Pepe however curled his lips up without understanding and muttered, "What a pity."

"Her Highness Mineva would not show up, and a Red Comet who's just an illusion…looks like I invested in the wrong party, did I?"

"You really like to joke around, superintendent."

Angelo finally could not hold in his emotions as he interrupted with a sharp voice. Pepe did not show any signs of wavering as he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Pardon my rudeness."

"My nerves are a little sensitive due to a lack of night. Besides, it seems that it had been rather noisy at the 'cove' since last night.

The term 'backstabbed' would refer to this situation. This man acutely sniffed out the fleet's movements as it prepared to defend

against the Federation's ambush. "I do understand…that you've been hiding the army's tactics from me." Pepe said, and it sounded like sarcasm to Angelo.

"But like I said before, I'm the superintendent of "Palau", and I have a duty to protect the civilians. Of course, everyone here is mentally prepared for danger, but I do hope we can have definitive proof for this price. What I'm saying is that we can have proof that makes us think it's worth getting involved."

Simply put, you're Char, right? Pepe's steady and warm stare was met with Frontal's cool attitude. "We have no intent of getting you involved in this." The voice that rang sounded as cold as an ice block, raising goosebumps on Angelo.

"We'll leave this place."

The tall and big figure clad in crimson red uniform got up as Frontal said this in a monotonous manner. Angelo knew that it was to be expected, but he did not expect it to be mentioned in such a situation as he withstood the wavering look within him. Pepe too looked like it was completely unexpected as he said with an agitated tone, "This…doesn't sound like a joke you'll make, Captain."

"Is that so? This isn't a joke. I'm here to visit you today to bid farewell to you too."

Bits of cigar ash dropped from Pepe's fingertips as his mouth was wide open. Frontal kept his silent smiling face and looked at the "Palau" sky that was behind the window Pepe was standing at .

"…Looks like it's start."

His face seemed to show that he caught sight of the enemy's presence from the other end of the artificial sun, in the space behind the thick layer of rock. *The Federation's attack—is coming earlier than expected.* Everything faded away quickly; the decorations that were as luxurious as possible, and Pepe, who was standing there blankly. The rising sense of battle rose within Angelo.

Part 9

Radar weapons had been viewed as useless ever since the discovery of Minovsky particles, but electronic warfare itself had not vanished. Due to the rampant nature of it, Minovsky particles had to be scattered during every single battle, so the particles that were scattered would rarely cause much damage to the electrical equipment. In other words, electronic weapons were effective equipment, and even at this point, military facilities relied on the warning system that relied on electronics. The Minovsky radar that could detect the range and density the particles were spread had been used for a long time, and basically, sentry watches were unchanged on the battlefield ever since the radar era.

"Palau" here was no exception. The Asteroid had multiple radar stations on the surface, and many RMS-119 "Zack" in the watch zones were acting as Early Warning and Control (EWAC). The siren stations, linked with the radar stations, were equipped with interception missiles, and the defense perimeter was overly strict for a civilian mining asteroid. However, the Federation army never viewed this as a problem during its regular checks. The radar stations were derived from the ones the Federation set up during the One Year War, and the missile were cleared under the name of shooting down the space debris. They could not find any reason to hide the mobile suits equipped with EWAC on the head, but they just needed to hide them in the 'cove' during the inspections.

April 12, 15.28. A "Zack" on patrol caught sight of a piece of debris that entered the space region they were guarding. That unit's pilot quickly went to the scene, and reported to the radar station in charge of this area.

"Lorgnette 3 calling Big Eye. There's an irregular in the Yap region. Should remain cautious. Sending my coordinates here."

After the war, the "Eye-Zack" was built with the Federation's RMS-106 "Hi-Zack" as a base, reinforced as an electronic weapon. It had the silhouette of the main fighting force of the Old Zeon Republic, the "Zaku". It was possible to say that this line of silhouette was suitable for Neo Zeon's se, but the dome line that was unified with the head was no less than 10m long, and the machine itself looked like someone wearing a really scary hat. The pilot clumsily drove the light grey machine around the debris in

question. This block of rock seemed to have floated over from the colony debris, and the largest piece was about 15m. This small block would not cause much damage even if it crashed into “Palau ”, but the army was on standby. The pilot let the “Eye-Zack” raise its machine gun and aimed at the surface of the debris. He set the firing mode to single fire, and his finger was placed on the firing trigger on the ball-shaped joystick, but an allied pilot’s voice came from the wireless communication. (Don’t do that. You’ll just waste your bullets.)

“But…!”

(Or you’ll end up writing a reflection again. Since you reported it, leave it to the alert side.)

The “Geara Zulu” pilot who was the same patrol squad did not have any other opinions. The money used to fire a shot would be enough to pay for one month’s worth of food for a person on Palau . This was the catchphrase of their squad leader, and the subordinates were forced not to use simulated projectiles in training. Even so, he had to bear full responsibility if something happened, so there was nothing less worthwhile than working in the army. The pilot of the “Eye-Zack” left the scene as he left the mission of observing the debris to the statio. There was less than a hundred million chance that the debris might hit the asteroid surface. In that case, they would have to use the intercepting missiles or let the mobile suits defending the facilities shoot to change the trajectory.

However, this block of debris was not on course to crash into “ Palau”. The debris was moving on the same course, looking like it

was moving rather slowly to “Palau”. The debris was taken off alert after it looked like it would float over the top of the main area , the “Calyx” and into another direction, and the radar station got back to normal. The debris then slowed down, and there was no reason for them to know why there was a heat source awakening within it.

There was a mass driver firing rail poking out from the top of the triangle-shaped “Calyx”, the nose tip of the “Palau” that looked like a beast’s skullcap. The array of rocks slipping through the perimeter net could be seen floating around. The debris slipped through the rocks and ignited a fake balloon that mimicked the color of the rocks. Two “Lotos” appeared from it, and as the balloon disappeared, the machines scattered and quickly mixed in amongst the rocks.

A “Loto” equipped with long cannons on both shoulders stuck itself onto the surface of the “Palau”, and another one with 4 Gatling cannons adjusted its position and created another fake balloon from the multi-purpose silo on its arms. That balloon immediately expanded and formed the exact same shape as the one that surrounded the two machines, and moved off towards the tip of “Palau” with unchanging speeds. The two “Lotos” covered for each other and snuck down onto the rock layer of the “Palau”. They then released several men in normal suits from the infantry transport room behind.

The ECOAS members carried the portable verniers they called the landmovers on their backs and gradually floated in the air. It was hard to distinguish their deep brown normal suits with the rocks as they carried the landmovers equipped with fire

extinguishers on their back, not letting out any dust-like presence at all as they glided onto “Palau”s surface. These men passed through the bottom of the alert side’s invigilation window and head towards the connecting shafts linking the “Calyx” and the three “Corollas”. No medium showed this group of men moving beside some dust from the rock layers swaying around, and they climbed onto the bottom of the shafts in less than 30 minutes.

They got past the bottom of the “Gaza D” that acted as a cannon , and split up to many different shafts. The AMX-006 “Gaza D” was a transformable mobile suit that used the mega-particle cannon as part of its body. When transforming, the arms would be folded behind, and the legs that were like a wild bird would support the cannon. 16 ECOAS 729 members started their operation with the “Gaza D” practically transformed into a cannon . Their tasked job was to climb the shafts and plant sticky high-explosive bombs there.

The shafts linking the large asteroids were 30m long in diameter , and the external thickness that surrounded this linear car path was about 1m thick. The largest shaft was about 3km, and if one counted the support pillars outside the quarry factories, there were 10 batches of shafts leading up and down. It was seemingly too tough to blow up these constructs completely, but if they set up a suitable amount of explosives at the crux and set off a chain reaction with maximum damage, all the materials would be blown away by their own weights. Such places included weak areas like shaft connectors, water pipes for cooling and a power generator installation near the exterior. The members climbed up the long and wide exterior of the shafts and got to work setting up the explosives.

The explosives that were used were the plastic explosives SHMX-type that could be used even in near absolute zero temperature, and they could adjust the formation accordingly in order to get the expected outcome of destruction. If they wanted to cut off a point, they would set up a thin rhombus-shaped diamond charge. If they wanted to blow it up, they would use a plate charge that had piercing ability. These methods were all part of the intricate mathematics required in explosiveness and construction engineering, and all the ECOAS members were well trained in them. This group of men was inside the Asteroids that were floating around, carrying out the simple yet dangerous mission only they could do with the hollow of the 'cove' the Neo Zeon army was docked at right below their eyes.

Commander Nasri Razal was hiding inside one of the two " Lotos" behind the rocks, the one with long-ranged cannons on both shoulders, and felt that this was a really long moment. The end of the operation was to be 2 hours later, and they could not check on the progress as long as communications were sealed. They had to continue on in this still time until all the members finished their work and came back safely.

"Don't make a mistake here. Daguza's watching after all…"

He brought his eyes to the periscope at the driver seat and stared at the green nightvision image. He could see the round cylinders of the debris in the quarry block, but could not see the shafts. He turned the periscope around and turned towards the space where debris was floating at. At that moment, an enemy patrol unit pointed the gun at him, and his heart froze. Since he

lost the disguise balloon, there was no hoping for a second time lucky.

I can't make a mistake here. I have to let my subordinates return. Nasri's sweaty hands held onto the grip of the periscope as he focused on the surroundings. A mobile suit form "Gaza D" seemed to swap around duties as it silently glided over to "Loto".

Part 10

(Everyone, this is the Captain speaking. We've confirmed that the advanced ECOAS squad has reached the destination. The operation will now move to the second phase. Mobile suit squad, get ready to launch. I look forward to everyone's contributions.)

Captain Otto's voice rang through the mobile suit, and this heroic mood from him was completely different from the usual Uncle Raccoon he was like. The supporting Manhunters seemed to have landed safely on "Palau". Riddhe put on the helmet of his normal suit and drew the wire gun from his ankles. He aimed for the innermost mobile suit hangar on the starboard and squeezed the trigger.

There was a slim machine silhouette as he was dragged by the wire gun that was rolling back. That was the MSN-001A1 "Delta Plus". It was a test transformable mobile suit left behind in Anaheim's warehouse, one that had no definite production standard, and this was the mobile suit Riddhe was newly assigned to. He originally wanted to pilot the "ReZEL" he was already used to, but he had to rely on this mobile suit this one. It was a test mobile suit from out of nowhere, and though there was a chance

that the right to pilot it can be transferred to him if he said that he wanted to pilot it, it was lucky that it was handed over to him. Riddhe looked up at the deep grey mobile suit on the hangar, looked around at how the mechanics were looking, took a deep breath, and floated there.

The half-wrecked "ReZEL" unit 008 was moved to the factory block, and Mechanical Officer Gibney and the mechanics of unit 008 were taking care of this "Delta Plus". "We can't use any of the "ReZEL"s spare parts. Pull out all the spare equipment from the storage!" Riddhe heard Gibney's growl as he turned to look at the narrow catwalk behind the hangar. As expected, the mechanics were handing out manuals and looking, not in the mood to be distracted elsewhere. *They're able to get to work now, right…*

(Romeo 009 and Juliet 5, launch with the second wave of ECOAS members. Once you get to the standby area, wait for the 3rd phase of the operation to begin. Romeos 008, 010 and 011, launch out as well. Cover the ship directly to prevent unexpected situations.)

Mihiro's tense voice echoed through the deck. At that moment, the whistling of the hydraulic drive and the metallic parts rumbling could be heard as Riddhe looked at the helicopter leading to the catapult deck. The ECOAS' transformable mobile suit got up from the flat armored car in its tank form, and was lifted up by an ugly machine. The tank that was at least two sizes smaller than the "ReZEL" crawled over there like a baby learning how to walk, and the machine that left the hangar was the "Jegan" codenamed Juliet 5. This special specs mobile suit had 3 rapid-fire missile launchers on both shoulders, and had a booster unit on the

back as an optional unit. It was a heavily armed version dubbed the “Complete Jegan”. The waist and legs were also equipped with additional armor onto its already bulky body. On the other end, the reports of crew leaving the ship caused the wireless communicator to get even noisier, and the linear activation shooting out from the catapult belts shook the air in the hangar slightly. The “ReZEL” Romeo 009, acting as the first to launch, transformed into a waver rider as it left the ship—and it was probably acting as the tank mover that was leaving the ship too.

Juliet 5 and Romeo 009 launched out first as they escorted ECOAS, while the “Delta Plus” and two “ReZELs” were to act as direct cover for the “Nahel Argama”. These were the operation priorities Riddhe and the mobile suits were assigned to in this raid on “Palau” called “Operation Billiard”. It seemed like a strategy formed by quick wits in order to make up for their lack of fighting strength, but if they could move on successfully, they would be able to shut off the counterattack by Neo Zeon. For Riddhe’s ‘side’, this plan had to succeed no matter what. He watched the “ Complete Jegan” get moved up the lift, and looked back at the catwalk, seeing a petite figure in normal suit there.

Despite the fact that her helmet visor was pulled down, Riddhe knew that it was ‘her’ from how she did not look like she fitted in. He felt relieved that she managed to make it to this place safely as he randomly raised his hand, making a hand signal to the petite person in normal suit, seemingly remaining still there. He climbed up the hangar platform, and was about to check on what the mechanics were doing, “So you came, the guy who went and returned back.” only to hear a gruff voice shot at him.

Gibney held onto the large spanner in his hand like he was holding onto a metal rod, baring his teeth as he grinned and looked at the ceiling. *Did he find out?* He suppressed his racing heart as he looked at the platform, only to find that there was no sight of 'her', and could only stare at the upper body of the "Delta Plus" standing there silently. Gibney stared at Riddhe who looked like he did not know what was going on, "Look at the shoulders, the shoulders." and said with a hoarse voice.

The "R008" was spray-painted on the shoulder armor behind the wrists and the booster unit. "They said you're going to ride on it. This is the codename of glory for the only one from the "Nahel Argama" who wasn't shot down." Gibney said as he gave an earnest smile not seen before, waiting for Riddhe's response. Riddhe did not really have feelings about the machine's serial number, but he courteously smiled and answered, "Well, to put it, I'm really grateful." Gibney chuckled heartily and put his arm around Riddhe's shoulders.

"We did what we can help you with, but the control system is so sensitive is scary. The thruster push isn't something the "ReZEL " can match. You'll get hurt if you think it's just like normal. Be careful."

"In other words, it's a ferocious horse?" Riddhe answered as he looked at the catwalk, "That's how it is." Gibney ignored this reply as he patted Riddhe on the back. Riddhe stared at the petite figure in the normal suit floating over from the handrail, and none of the mechanics around him noticed—

"Sorry to let you go out there with a machine you're unfamiliar with."

"I returned back after a detour out anyway. It's a miracle that I can launch."

"You sure can talk, don't you, brat." Gibney rubbed the bottom of his nose and turned his extremely grateful expression away from Riddhe. "You barely managed to escape, and yet came back again. You really become an independent man."

I want to live and die together with this ship… the mechanical officer's voice sounded like he thoroughly believed Riddhe's voice. It could not be helped that Riddhe felt hurt by it, but at this point, he could not cancel the plan like this. He moved away from the gentle Gibney and said, "Then, mechanical officer, can I just remain like this before I launch?" before looking over at him.

"Eh?"

"Because I want to have time with my beloved machine."

He took out the biplane model from the bag on his belt, and Gibney snorted as he showed a wry expression on his face. "At such a moment again? You really like that thing, don't you?" He tapped Riddhe's helmet and shouted to his subordinates, "OI!"

"HIS HIGHNESS THE ENSIGN IS GOING INTO ZEN MODE BEFORE LAUNCH. GET ON STANDBY, EVERYONE!"

The demonic NCO yelled out, and the mechanics left the machine. Riddhe used the moment Gibney turned around to give ' her' a signal. The petite figure in the normal suit stepped on the head of the Gundam-type mobile suit "Delta Plus" that was without horns, and quickly slid into the cockpit. Riddhe checked that no one else was on board and intended to follow in. But…

"WAIT A SEC!"

Gibney's roar echoed through the deck, and Riddhe was unable to move his body as his hand was on the cockpit hatch. He looked around in a terrified manner, and met the mechanical officer in the eye as it was unknown when he was looking over.

"Let's pray for Ensign Riddhe to be successful in battle. Everyone salute!"

On Gibney's command, the mechanics floating in zero gravity quickly raised their hands to salute. Riddhe saw the passion the mechanics had in their stares from all angles, and he gave a proper salute back to them before sneaking into the cockpit with a heartaching feeling. He finally stared at Gibney's slightly bloodshot eyes and closed the hatch.

The back of the hatch that was closed became a screen, completing the all-view monitor that had already been activated. Riddhe could not relax even if he wanted to, and wiped off the sweat on his forehead first before calling behind, "No need to worry now. You can take off the helmet." The person hiding behind the linear seat poked her head out and opened the helmet

visor. Mineva Lao Zabi's white tender face entered Riddhe's eyes, and he found himself starting to tremble at this point.

It had been more than 6 hours since they finally managed to get back onto the "Nahel Argama". Riddhe managed to convince the Captain who was guilty for making him write unnecessary letters, and as he was going through the usual procedures in getting back to the mobile suit squad, Mineva was hiding at the bottom of the launch, waiting for the time to go out. Both of them managed to last through the guards' inspections, but they never had a chance to meet each other after there. In the end, she ended up floating around the ship alone. they already planned a detailed schedule, and he did hand her a path to move along in the ship, but it was nearly a miracle that she managed to reach this place without anyone's detection. Normally, even if her legs did not weaken, she might had gotten lost on the way, move down a suspicious path, and could have been questioned.

Speaking of which, there was no reason for the two of them to meet at this place not for this level of guts she had. The emerald eyes looked rather calm by the side as Riddhe removed a monitor panel beside the seat and pulled out an assistance seat for training. Mineva took off her helmet and said silently, "Is this alright?"

Gibney and the rest were moving over to their standby areas right in front of their eyes. Riddhe carried the pain that had not subsided in him and shrugged.

"It's a lie if I say that it's not a huge problem, but I have no choice. I can't create a chance for you to leave if I don't do this."

"What about Mr Takuya and Miss Micott?"

"Don't worry. Mihiro will take care of them. The basic plan in this battle is a hit and run, so the chances of the ship being caught in battle aren't high."

Riddhe patted the assistance seat as he finished the setup, and added, "Though we need something to be successful." Mineva sat on it with a complicated expression and gave a probing look over, "You'll only attack military facilities, right?"

"Logically that should be the case. It seems that there's a spy from the Intelligence Branch inside "Palau", so the operation is made knowing where the objects are and the factory schedules. We won't do anything that will cause the residence block to get damaged."

After saying that, Riddhe remembered who he was talking to. " You're concerned after all, aren't you?" Mineva answered the curious Riddhe with an unhappy face, "The Superintendent of " Palau" is a man is someone who only cares for benefits to himself at all costs."

"But the residents have no relations to him. I can't tolerate it if this operation will hurt the residents of "Palau". Even if I have to rob this mobile suit, I want to go back to tell them."

Mineva's eyes looked like she would really this. Riddhe looked away from the pressuring eyes on him and deliberately consciously let out a relaxed voice as he sat on the linear seat, " Don't show such a scary expression."

"I'm risking my life here as well. I might even end up facing the firing squad if I mess up here, you know?"

Mineva hid her speechless expression as she remained silent. That expression was like a youth who did not know how to suppress his emotions. He recalled that she was able to say astounding things in the face of adults, and was yet able to show her inner self so directly it was surprising. Riddhe understood that this was an inexplicable girl he was facing, felt a mysterious sensation rising in his chest, and clicked his tongue inside his heart . He looked away from the side of Mineva's face, and deliberately spoke with a self-defeat tone, "Well, we made it all the way here, so it's pointless to even worry now. Just help us pray that this good luck will continue."

"Good luck?"

"Including how we managed to make it all the way here, our luck here also includes the coincidence of how the operation would begin when that place is closest to Earth and this "Delta Plus". This guy here can break through the atmosphere without any optional parts. I won't be able to think of such a reckless plan if this machine wasn't moved here. I don't know whether the luck is yours or mine, but anyway, we're very lucky here."

I'm half-saying this to myself. Riddhe shut his mouth after saying this. Even though they could keep up this momentum and make it all the way to their destination successfully, there was no solid proof that things would develop just as they hoped for. Riddhe too felt repulsed by the fact that he had to rely on the 'family' he had hiding from at this point, but there was no other way. They could

only proceed on by believing in their own luck. *Even if I'll be slandered as a traitor, I have to fulfill my duty and responsibility as someone present*— Riddhe wiped away the sweat that flowed out again and grabbed onto the control stick like he was ready for anything. He checked the energy gain value that was higher than that of the "ReZEL"s, and saw that the attachments were removed. "I understand." Mineva's voice rang suddenly.

"I'll believe. Believe in my luck and your courage."

She was seated on the assistance seat slightly behind, on the right side of the linear seat, her emerald eyes smiling back at him. As his heart skipped a beat (Romeo 008, please head to the catapult deck.) Mihiro's voice rang. Riddhe answered "Roger that." and looked forward. He slowly stepped on the pedal and said briefly, " We're going. Put on the helmet." Mineva did not look concerned by how Riddhe was looking away from her unnaturally as she wordlessly put on the helmet.

Riddhe raised the right mechanical arm lightly to bid farewell to Gibney and the rest, and put the personalized shield fastened beside the hangar on the machine's left hand. He drew the personal beam rifle from the wall's equipment, and let the machine with its weight increased at that moment move off, leaving the " Nahel Argama"s mobile suit deck he probably would not be returning to. He let the lift carry him onto the catapult deck, and the first catapult that formed the bow of the ship appeared right in front of him. As the shutter opened, the guiding lights on the other end light up the catapult headed into space. At this point, they looked like pyres for those who would never return.

"Once we see that the third phase is successful, I'll leave the frontlines. As long as the operation is successful, we won't have to fight against the enemy units. Maybe our units will pursue us, but with this guy's acceleration, it's easy to shake them off. Then, we'll head straight for our destination."

I'm getting ready to do something stupid. Riddhe suppressed the timidity that was rising up in his mind as he said. "Yes." Mineva responded.

"Even if it's the closest point to Earth, it'll take at least two days to reach Earth. Water and food's prepared, but you better get ready."

"I don't mind. Go ahead."

Mineva curled herself in this narrow assistance seat for instructions, and showed a look that she was already prepared. Riddhe glanced behind at those widened emerald eyes, thought that she was really beautiful again, and shook his head to look forward at the space in front of him.

We can't relax here. She's an important person of Neo Zeon, our enemy. She's also the crux to this incident, the existence that can stop this chaos. That's why I decide to save her—to expose the truth of how the Federation intended to bury everything under the table and avenge the souls of those dead men. People might say this is an immature sense of justice, but I'm in a situation where I can do all these. I have something I have to do—didn't Squad Leader Norm say this? This is the

responsibility I'm tasked with for being the sole survivor. This is a duty I have to fulfill as someone present. It has nothing to do with any personal feelings I have for her…

(Romeo 008, catapult equipped. Get ready to launch.)

Mihiro's broadcast voice rang in Riddhe's ears, pulling his wavering consciousness. He was about to reply "understood", only to notice that the wireless communicator was switched to another channel.

(Good luck, Ensign Riddhe. I haven't forgotten the promise to watch a movie.)

Even though it was through the visor, Mihiro's eyes on the communication window were giving off a slight heat. Riddhe immediately remembered the positioning of the camera and realized that Mineva was not on her monitor. He felt a bitter sense of betrayal in his mouth as he said vaguely, "Understood." And stared at the round eyes that were like a small animal.

"…It'll definitely happen one day."

Eh? Mineva frowned, but RIddhe did not look at it any further. He held onto the control stick and raised his voice to remove all regret,

"Riddhe Marcenas, Romeo 008. "Delta Plus". Launching!"

The countdown timer showed zero, and the linear propelled catapult was shot out as the G-force rose out of a sudden, striking

his body. The portside catapult that was severely damaged passed by his eyes at that moment, and as the machine was about to reach the end of the runway, the "Delta Plus" shot out flares from its thruster jets and leaped off the catapult. The thick grey machine floated towards the void.

"I'm going to test the transformation. Hang on."

The capabilities would decide whether the plan would succeed. Riddhe executed the transformation without waiting for Mineva's reply. The torso popped up, covering the head, the legs that were foldable extended out left and right, and the binders on the back bended by 90 degrees, forming the machine's wings. The shield that was below the machine became the bow of this streamlined version.

This thing was basically not much different from the "ReZEL" Waverider. However, this machine that managed to complete its transformation within several milliseconds had a volume reminiscent of a fighter jet in the atmosphere, and the visual sharpness was not something the "ReZEL" could match. The main wings on both left and right side were just like a winged machine, and even the side flaps used for flight control had designs on them . Riddhe checked the locations of the two "ReZELs" that left the machine first as he stepped on the pedal lighting. The unexpected amount of G-force struck his body, and the body of the "Nahel Argama" faded away at that moment. A chill struck his body, and his organs felt like they dropped below his navel.

"Amazing…!"

The thrusters still have power. Can I really pilot this overly picky machine? at that moment, Riddhe felt anxious. (008, you're moving too far in front. Don't break the defensive formation.) he heard an allied pilot growl, and hurriedly transformed the machine back into the mobile suit form. He cut off the sending signals of the communicator as he looked behind and asked "Are you alright?" The assistance seat had none of the G-force resistance the linear seat had. Mineva was slumped heavily into the assistance seat as she said,

"It's alright. Don't mind me."

Her abdomen looked like it was rising and dropping in a painful manner, Mineva said that with her eyes widened. That fearless voice caused Riddhe to feel the pressure in his chest rising, and he wordlessly looked forward.

There were still no signs of the "Palau" amidst the vacuum as the debris floated around wildly. *We should be around the security zone. Are the mobile suits that launched first are okay? Have the ECOAS group hiding in "Palau" finished their job as planned? If any factor gets messed up, our plan will also be doomed.* Riddhe shook away the countless factors of failures in his mind as he stared at the digital clock that was set in Greenwich Time. 17.44. The climax of this 3rd phase of "Operation Billiard" is about to begin, and the time left is —

Part 11

10 minutes later, at 17.54, the last member passed through the hatch, and the door of the “Loto” infantry transport room was closed up.

“Team Omega’s retreat is complete. None of the fireworks were changed.”

The vice commander seated at the front reported. It was 40 seconds earlier than predicted, but there was no time to be relieved over everyone’s safe return as Nasri ordered, “Right, send a signal to the “Nahel Argama”.”

“Once it’s sent, we’ll leave the current location. We’ll then rendezvous with the mobile suit squad on the “Nahel Argama” and cover 920’s entry.”

The pilot at the control seat pulled the joystick down in cadence with the repeated voice. The “Loto” hidden under the shadow of the rocks stood up, and the legs with the caterpillar belts crushed stepped onto the rocky surface. Nasri checked that their allied machine has left, and turned the periscope over to the space where the “Palau” was. He could only see the transport ships coming and going, and could not see any thruster flares that indicated an enemy ship. Space was silent, but they sent out a wireless signal, so it was best to think that it was a matter a time before the enemy discovered them. The time at this point was 17.55, and there were 5 minutes before the main event of “Operation Billiard” began. The long 5 minutes that were hard to endure would match the 2 hours before as it bgan.

"It's not often that we can see such a show in this Celestial Sphere. Don't you dare miss, "Nahel Argama"."

Nasri looked at the shafts linking the Asteroids to each other as he mused in his dry mouth. Several Gaza machines left the surface, causing Nasri to wonder if they were moving because they detected an abnormal electric wave.

Part 12

"ECOAS 729 called in. The Object Ball has been placed."

One could tell from Ensign Mihiro's tense voice that she did not have time to feel relieved over the end of the second phase. Object ball—their positions were set. There was no backing out from this competition. They had to quickly release the cue and let the cue ball hit the gathered targets. "Alright!" Otto let out a voice that echoed through the bridge, and used this momentum to pause his thoughts. He picked up the ship's phone from the Captain's seat armrest and pressed on the button to broadcast to the entire ship.

"This is the Captain notifying all hands. We'll begin the 3rd phase of the operation. At this moment, our ship will rush into enemy space and attack their base with the hyper mega-particle cannon."

First Officer Liam, who was seated at the console in front together with the cannon operator and the navigation officer, gave a tense glance at Otto. The sensor operator was sitting at the left console, and Ensign Mihiro was on the right. The second communication room was left to Operator Bellard for him to

contact ECOAS and pass the information. The often-empty commander's seat beside the Captain's seat was occupied by Alberto, and this observer's unreliable face was all pale, but nobody in the ship had time and will to send him to the safe living quarters for safety. Otto ignored Alberto, who swallowed his saliva hard, and said,

"As everyone knows, we need all the power on the ship to fill the hyper mega-particle cannon. Our ship will now head towards the enemy watchzone at the fastest speed possible, but we'll have to rely on inertia once we start loading. We won't be able to turn and adjust ourselves, and the main and side cannons can't be used. We can only use the ship's navigation speed to break through the enemy's perimeter."

In other words, once they rushed out, they would not be able to stop. They had to barge into the firing zone with such restrained conditions and fire the hyper mega-particle cannon at the target. They had to break through the enemy's ranks until the ship's power was regained. Otto heard the sighs of the crew members that amounted to more than a hundred for himself and emphasized, "This is a dangerous gamble."

"However, the success of this operation will depend on this hit. I hope every crew member can rise up to the challenge."

He put down the ship's phone and stared at everyone's faces on the bridge. It was impossible to see the crew's expressions as they were covered by the normal suits' helmets, but Otto felt the weight

of the life in each individual body more than ever. He took in the last mouth of breath he could take and finally gave the order, "All hands, check the airlocks." and closed the visor of his helmet.

"All hands, accelerate defensed. Proceed at high speeds."

Soon after the command was repeated countless times, the trembling of the machines was amplified, and the ship itself shook with a rattling voice. 10 thruster nozzles let out flares at the same time, and the 400m long giant ship let out an impact from the inside. The "Nahel Argama" was starting to accelerate. Otto held onto the armrests tightly as he stared at the navigation screen in front of him.

The stars that were on the bridge windows did not move. Nothing could prove that the ship was accelerating other than the speedometer, but the G-force striking from the front increased its pressure regularly, causing the sweat under Otto's armpits to flow towards the back. They started from the 'safe driving' of 1km per minute, and gradually accelerated such that it went down to 50 seconds, 40, 30. Once it reached the 30 second mark, the G force on the bodies exceeded 3G, and the skin on the faces were rattling.

The body that had the weight of the normal suit added on felt like a lead block, and he could not lean on the backrest. His arms felt heavy, like they were being pulled down by something, and if he relaxed, it seemed like the force would strike through the armrests fully. Otto continued to stare at the navigation screen as he heard the groans from the opened wireless communicator inside the ship. Soon, they would reach their fastest speed—3km per second as the ship accelerated by the minute.

The ship let out a rattling sound, and the continuous acceleration monitor let out a warning light. The minute space dust hitting it would let out a sandstorm-like sound inside the ship. The G-force on the body exceeded 6G. The “Nahel Argama”, escorted by three machines bore the G-force that was equivalent to that of leaving the atmosphere, and it passed through the shoal space region like a rocket. (We’re about to reach the enemy watchzone.) (Minovsky particles, scattered to battle situation density). Otto heard Liam and the rest let out reports that sounded like groans through the wireless communicator, saw that the value on the acceleration monitor was already what they planned, and shouted with all his strength, “HYPER MEGA-PARTICLE CANNON, READY TO FIRE!”

The vibrations of the engine faded away quickly, and the G-force that were pressing down on the body was weakening. (Coordinates stabilized, designated as the target instructed by the ship) (Engines stopped, proceeding by inertia. Focusing all power to the hyper mega-particle cannon!) (All hands, switch to the backup power). The voices rang and disappeared through the wireless communicator, and the lights in the bridge were switched to the red light of the backup power. This time, an impact from the back struck everyone. As the acceleration ended, the G-force on the bodies became zero, and the bodies that were released from intense pressure bent forward.

The thrusters stopped, and the ship that lost the propelled power flew in space by inertia. The real danger began at this point. The sounds of the ship’s rattling was fading gradually, but the sounds of minute debris was still pinging on the ship’s external

armor. The air sac of the normal suits crumpled, and the Otto felt an itchy feeling in his lower body during to blood circulation flowing into his numb parts. He held his breath and stared at the sensor visual.

The navigation path was designed by comparing the latest space maps, but it was possible for the debris flying over to obstruct their way. The effective range of their sensors was reduced to a range of about 20km radius at this point as they had scattered Minovsky Particles. All signs of debris in the way would collide directly into the "Nahel Argama" within milliseconds…

Suddenly, a black shadow grazed past their sights, causing the sweat on Otto's back to freeze. A small white light flickering outside the window as an allied machine diagonally in front of them—Ensign Riddhe's "Delta Plus" was telling everyone that it was carrying out adjustments. The irregular debris floating in from the space outside seemed to graze past something not too far away from the ship as it flew behind. (Hii…) Mihiro let out a weak shriek a second later as the debris floated away from the sensor's range.

(This is too reckless…)

Alberto moaned with his hands covering his head. *Who do you think was the cause behind this?* Otto suppressed the urge to let out this voice from his throat and his body felt the engine rumble again. (The anti-air Gatling guns can still work, shoot down the irregular rocks!) The sound of the hyper mega-particle cannon gathering power overpowered Liam's growl as it got louder and louder. The large monster sucked up all the power the "Nahel

Argama" generated and rumbled. The 50m long large cannon poking out from the hull of the ship spread the melody of the power generated and gathered through the ship.

17.59. The time schedule was going at a difference of 5 seconds. At this point, they could only leave their luck to Heaven. Otto saw the spot of light on "Palau" on the screen and exerted strength in his hands resting on the armrests. They would shoot the fireworks ECOAS 729 set up at the Pyramid Spot on the rhombus at 18.00. There were 3 seconds left, 2, 1…

Part 13

0. Universal Century 0096, April 12th, 18.00 sharp.

Not a lot of vehicles were moving through the connecting shafts of "Palau" at this time. The factories had three work shifts through 24 hours, and the job shift for night duty ended 2 hours ago. The people working in the morning shift had returned home, and the people working during the night shift were still in dreamland. Thus, not many linear cars were in operation. As for what would be moving along this long and wide tube-like tunnel, that would be the linear cars without anyone in them, ferrying the mined rocks or trucks sending food and daily necessities. Including them, there were still less than 20 vehicles moving on a shaft.

Suddenly, an intense tremor spread inside the tunnel. The booming noise blew up the highway that was 3km long. The ferrying trucks present hurriedly stepped on the brakes and brought the vehicles to the road shoulders. There was no gravity within the connecting shafts, but the tires' magnetism on the

ground made the vehicles feel no different from a gravity block. *Did a meteor strike?* The truck driver floated out from the driver seat and intended to land on the ground with his magnetic soles. However, he floated in the air like this, and heard a second explosion.

The magnetism isn't working. Is it a power outage? He did not even have the time to think as the lights in the tunnel went out and changed to a red light. At the same time, there was a flash expanding right in front of him, and a storm blew through the wide tube. The truck driver was blown away by the wind, and was soon knocked 50m away. His back slammed into the partition shutter that was activated, was knocked unconscious because of this impact, and remained asleep for the next three hours without knowing anything until the firemen arrived at the scene to wake him up once everything ended.

The 'fireworks' ECOAS planted were exploded. They timed this moment where traffic flow was at its minimum and blew up the areas near the connecting shafts with SHMX, creating the expected destructive outcome on the connecting shafts. The supersonic explosion winds were compressed into a shockwave, and a fatal fissure was caused by the explosion spread while the generators on the other side of the shafts showed deep cracks. The energy from the explosions multiplied without any wastage, causing the cracks outside the shafts to form breaks. The cracks letting out gas and flames instantly expanded. They expanded to form a round around the 30m diameter shafts, and all 10 of them ended up being severed like they were sliced at the waste.

The unmanned linear car carrying the mined rocks made an emergency stop, and emergency partition walls were lowered before and after the breaks. Fires spurted out from the broken areas, and numerous lights lit the joints of the 4 asteroids. However, it was just a poke of a needle at the stomach of “Palau”. The trajectory of the large asteroids would not change as long as nuclear weapons were not used. Of course, there was no major obstruction to the main part “Calyx”, and even the 3 “Corollas” were not affected. The “Palau” continued to remain floating in the shoal space region just like how it was before the explosion, but all connecting shafts were severed, and the 4 asteroids could be said to be separated from each other—this was the first time in the history of “Palau” that the 4 asteroids were separated from each other, and only managed to maintain the usual “Palau” shape. However, there was no time to check on what happened here as a second incident struck “Palau”.

Two unknown machines entered the watchzone at the same time as the explosion. More accurately, there were 3 machines. A “ ReZEL” transformed into its Waverider form, an ECOAS 920 “Loto ” riding on the back, and there seemed to be a third heat source sighted on the radar—but there was electronic interference after that, which made further observations impossible. The “Nahel Argama” followed the advance squad and entered the watchzone, scattering Minovsky Particles that caused this interference.

Multiple unknown machines started moving towards “Palau” at the moment there were explosions in many areas. This was undoubtedly an attack, and 4 “Geara Zulus” were launched hurriedly from the military port ‘cove’. They had an “Eye Zack”

checking where the enemy was attacking, the mobile suits located at the alert sites left the surface, and the many "Gaza Ds" set a perimeter around the 'cove'. The defense squad that detected an abnormal electric pulse from "Palau" believed that the enemy had already snuck into their camp. The alert sites lights were moving around, and a "Gaza D" pilot searching "Palau"s surface caught sight of a deep brown machine hiding in a crater.

It had a rock-like color scheme on it, but it could not evade detection under close range. The "Gaza D" pilot detected the "Loto "s heat source and pursued the attack as it transformed. The hook-like hands turned around from the stand it was like, and the body in the shape of a cannon grew a pair of hands. Despite having an arthopod-like silhouette that was dubbed 'an alien transport', the mobility "Gaza D" in mobile suit form was not something the "Loto" could match. The "Loto" fired its Gatling cannons on the shoulders wildly, using the weak verniers to move back, and the "Gaza D" pilot charged right over at its enemy.

At that moment, another shot came from another direction, hitting the "Gaza D" directly. The "Gaza D" had no chance of drawing the beam saber from its shoulder binders as it was sliced in half at the waist, and the weak machine frame blew up under the expanding fireball. The other "Loto" fired a 120mm low recoil cannon from behind the rock—and Squad Leader Nasri Razal " Loto" rushed out from the rock after checking that the enemy was shot down, and let its humanoid body with thick Gatling cannons on its shoulders hide in the next hiding spot.

The landscape of "Palau" was saved into their database, and they would not make the simple mistake of letting themselves get

caught by the enemy so easily even if it were enemy territory. ECOAS specialty was concealment. Nasri checked that the allied unit acting as bait started to move, and proceeded on to find the next prey. They wanted to use this method to shoot down as many enemies as they could in this manner and support Daguza and his ECOAS 920 squad members in their assault. In order to break into "Palau" and go through lots of effort to save the capture civilian, they had to create a commotion as obvious as possible and gather the enemy's sights on them. There were only a few seconds until the main event of "Operation Billiards"—the firing of the hyper mega-particle cannon. Nasri saw the large number of enemies rushing out from the 'cove' through the periscope, and gave a numb-looking smile on his lips.

There would be an assault after the destruction, and a ring of exploding light indicating that their allied machine was shot down came after. "Palau" descended into sudden chaos, but it would be later that the people in the large round tubes between "Calyx"—the inner walls of the shield machine knew about this. The explosion of the connecting shafts merely sounded like thunder to them from afar, and they could not experience the tremors for themselves. The resident blocks on both sides were about to have the usual sunset, and the only thing ringing dully was the sirens mixed with the winds, indicating an abnormal situation.

In the center Uppertown, Pepe was in his official residence near the governor's estate, and got on the leather chair the moment he heard the siren. Full Frontal asked to break off ties with him on his side, and to him, who was about to go mad, who was able to negotiate with people in the related worlds, that siren sounded like it was the declaration of destruction. On the other side, in the

Downtown area, Tikva kicked over the dining chair and ran out of the house while ignoring his mother's attempt to stop him.

His father, Marida and the Captain returned to the ship because it was said that there was an emergency order. Banagher too disappeared after he went out. *There's no reason for him to escape*— the Captain said so, and Tikva did not feel that the immature prisoner had such courage, but the sound of the siren sounded abnormally heavy, causing his chest to flutter. Quite a few people felt the same too, and they looked up at the artificial sun that disappeared, praying to God that their relatives in the Neo Zeon Army could remain safe.

Banagher did not have this luxury. He walked out from the subway at the military facility 'cove', moved through the zero gravity path, and ended up feeling the tremors of the explosion closer than Tikva and the rest.

DUN. A deep noise echoed through the path devoid of anyone else, and the siren could be heard after that. This path that was recorded on the monitor sheet map was a service route that was used by the guards at the excavation fields. It was connected to all the tunnels like a net, and ordinary people would be prohibited from entering this 'cove'. Banagher compared the area code on the wall with the monitor sheet to see where he was, and had a premonition that caused him to panic in the midst of the aftershock. It was 6pm, the time the 'receivers' would arrive—

"It started…"

It was the Federation's attack. There was no other guesses as Banagher hastened his speed up the liftgrip. He did not head towards the 14th spacegate he was told to head to, but went to the 'cove' Neo Zeon fleet base. The attack started, and his plan might be something unnecessary, but he could only continue on. Whether he could succeed or not, there was no other way to bring the residents of "Palau" away from the battlefield. He looked forward while hearing the sirens annoy his nerves like they were prompting him. This was just a premonition that things were beginning, and the hands holding onto the liftgrip were sweating.

Part 14

Numerous light spots appeared on the asteroid joints, and the flashes merely remained for a moment. The gas left over from the explosions floated to the shadows of the asteroids and could not be observed. The main screen show that "Palau" looked just like usual.

(We've sighted an explosion of light at "Palau"s connecting shafts!)

(Hyper mega-particle cannon, loading rate is 120%. Preparations to fire are complete.)

The cannon operator's voice quickly passed through the wireless communicator right after the sensor operator. Otto got up from the Captain seat and stared at the "Palau" that was optically corrected. There were three fat rock blocks "Carollas" gathered around the bow shaped "Calyx"—and since ECOAS had already

cut off all the connecting shafts, those were 4 blocks of rocks sticking to each other through inertia. In that case, the object balls were lined up, and they just needed to use the cue to fire the cue ball and knock down all the target baclls lined up in a rhombus.

We must hit the vital spot in one hit. Otto told himself silently in his heart as he seemingly gathered his courage. But at this moment …

(High heat sources approach! Two of them. Mobile suits.)

The sensor operator's voice caused Otto's order to remain stuck at his throat. *Why at this moment?* He looked at the sensor monitor and stared at the indicated unknown targets. 4 mobile suits were launched from "Palau" and two of them passed through their mobile suit advanced squad and moved close to this point. The " Nahel Argama" itself was moving at a high speed, so both sides were closing in on each other at an alarming rate. The target was right in front of them, and this battleship could not dodge or fire as it approached undefended.

It was a thought that happened in less than a second. (Let the cover intercept…) Otto interrupted Liam's words that were about to come out "LEAVE THEM ALONE!" and yelled.

"GET OUR ALLIES OUT OF THE WAY! HYPER MEGA-PARTICLE CANNON, BEGIN THE ATTACK!"

To heck with them. Otto ignored Alberto, who was looking over at him in surprise, and slumped himself tightly onto the Captain's seat. The voices repeating the command rang, and as all their

allied mechas were out of the range, (Ready…FIRE!) the cannon operator's voice rang inside his helmet.

At that moment, the 400m long ship trembled, rocking the bridge. The flash dashed past the window as it went off to the other end, and even the anti-glare filter could not reduce the intensity of this powerful light that covered Otto's sights.

Part 15

At its critical stage, the large mega-particle cannon was released from the I-field perimeter; it carried out 8 levels of acceleration and gathering inside the ring, and the particles were fired outs. This scorching beam of light took all the power the "Nahel Argama" had and cut through space, first devouring the two "Geara Zulus" that were closing in on its path.

It was relatively moderate in terms of electrical output, but the mega-particle beam still showed a tendency to expand according to its range and fade off. That was why the "Nahel Argama" rushed into firing range and shot the hyper mega-particle cannon at what could be said to be extremely close range, and the two " Geara Zulus" were right in there, letting the beams rush over in the middle of this distance that was less than 20km away. The enemy units were swallowed by the beam that was as large as them, and one of the "Geara Zulu" that suffered fatality was melted like wax candles in a furnace, while the other mobile suit was 1km away from the beam, but was unable to avoid the shockwave and the scattered particles. That "Geara Zulu"s armor

were all ripped off at the same moment the former mobile suit was destroyed, and the shockwave that reached it ripped the frame apart.

As the beam raced out, the other two mobile suits pursuing the "ReZEL" and the "Complete Jegan" suffered similar fates. They took the destructive power of the scattered particles that were as destructive as a normal mega-particle beam from the back, and their devastated machines were blown aside from the shockwave, igniting the core reactor furnaces. The hot fusion energy maintained by the I-field spread out in an explosive manner, the humanoid machines with sleeves decorations on them were broken down into limbs, and the giant beam continued to expand. The beam had these lights decorating the path like flowers, and they were just sparkler firestarters that were meant to be blown up before the beam arrived. The sublight arrow was shot out from the "Nahel Argama" at supersonic speed, causing the tip at the top to hit the "Palau", scorching the surface of "Carolla A". This massive energy was enough to rock a small asteroid and cause it to accelerate—the connecting shafts were blown, and the "Corolla A" that was linked to the other asteroids started to leave its fixed orbit as it moved.

And just like how the asteroid was moved over to this point from the Asteroid Belt, the direct hit from the hyper mega-particle cannon brought about a thrust that could match a nuclear pulse engine, causing an asteroid in a corner of "Palau" to be pushed out . This asteroid slammed into "Corolla B", dragged a mining factory down as it touched the "Calyx" surface. The impact from "A" caused "B" to move and slam into "C", and after that, it seemed like "B" moved together with "A" to slam into "Calyx". The "

Calyx" bore the brunt of the 3 asteroids mass and motions as it got knocked off course greatly, causing the tip of the bowhead to tilt mightily.

The broken connecting shafts started to bend at the base, and the collisions caused winds to dance on the surface and into space. The result of the hyper mega-particle cannon cue ball hitting the balls caused the 4 asteroids object balls to crash into each other in a chain reaction, causing the a Celestial-scale billiard performance in the shoal space region. From the outside, the 4 tightly packed asteroids might have moved just by a bit, and the "Palau" that was covered in flying dust did not change its shape. However, this was really an earthshaking thing to the people inside. This was definitely a large earthquake that could have caused the skies to crash down. The earthquake caused the two residential blocks in " Calyx" to tumble violently, and there were cracks on the 'hill'. The dust accumulated within the inner walls flew up, all the houses' windows were shattered, and the residents were rolling and tumbling around for several meters. Tikva was no exception as he tumbled on the road due to the rumbling, grabbed onto the outer wall that was shaking slightly, and looked up at the sky. The earthquake boomed through the surroundings echoing through the cylinder of this residence block. *Did the shield machine digging into the 'hill' work on its own?* Tikva thought blankly as he stared at this bladed digging tool that was abandoned before he was born and was about to be buried under the oxidized rocks. He vaguely heard the sounds his siblings shrieking and his mother calling his name.

The chandelier came crashing down in the governor's house, and Pepe hid under the table to avoid danger. The "Palau"

residential block was built to take advantage of the hardy ability to withstand the shield machine's activation, and it was no wonder this governor's estate that was thoroughly decorated took the greatest damage. Chaos too descended on the excavation field under zero gravity, as there were materials left in the air and baskets hitting the artificial, and pipelines were snapped together with the fissured ground. There was not just one crack on the underground tunnels, and the pale-faced workers were hurriedly trying to escape, but this was not all that could describe the devastated 'cove'.

Due to the direct hit on the sun, the melted magma-like surface could not fade off easily. The "Corolla A" let out gas as it moved towards the "Calyx", causing the gap between the asteroids to be show, and the Neo Zeon fleet stationed there lost their exit. The entire military port was sealed inside the 'cove' as a result.

The connecting shafts were severed, and several seconds later, another rock blocked the exit, causing the mobile suit squadrons that were mobilized in this emergency to suffer from having to remain there. Several "Geara Zulus" managed to sneak out of the gap before the exit was sealed, but the "Gaza Cs" that followed were crushed by this tectonic plate, letting out explosions of light in the openings. The military port facilities were not exempt from damage either. The rock bits that scattered due to the impact crushed the oil tankers and the dredge ships, and rain of fire and rubble descended on the factories at the base of the craters. The many factories were crushed and devoured by fire, lighting up the large hole that was gradually becoming sealed from time to time. The moored ships started releasing their restrains one by one, casting aside their supplies that were half loaded as they tried to

leave the dock, but still could not get back the rock shutter that accelerated over.

A captain of a Salamis-class patrol ship saw the rock plate closing in from the bridge's window. The crate that was 5km in diameter and 2km caused the military port at the bottom of the crater to burn and fall, and the term 'landslide' alone would not be able to explain it thoroughly. It looked like the sky collapsed on them, and the Salamis-class was devoured by debris inside the cave. We won't make it—it was too late for the Captain to make this decision as the stalactites supporting the roof bit into the ship, and the crater closing in from the bottom raised the ship. In the face of this rock that was the size of an asteroid, the patrol ship did not even have the tolerance of a fly as the keel supporting the hull were snapped, the crushed bridge tumbled onto the deck, and the heat and flash from the core reactor that ignited rose up. Flames rose out from the tightly knitted rock surfaces, creating a border between the two asteroids that had basically become one.

The deep red color could be seen from above the "Delta Plus" despite it being separated from the cloud of dust. The "Corolla A" took a direct high from the hyper mega-particle cannon, and the surface hot surfaces showed lights of ships and mobile suits appearing twice, thrice, lighting the rubble flying all over the place periodically.

"Did it succeed?"

""Palau"s burning…!"

Riddhe and Mineva saw the red burning surfaces from the cockpit afar, and they could not say anything else. The "Nahel Argama" that was headed to the same place was using up all its inertia as it went right at "Palau", they could only rely on the mobile suit squadron acting as direct cover until the functions were restored and they leave the place. Riddhe's eyes scanned for enemies and found them coming out for the 'cove'. *I can't let the battle drag on further. I have to hurry up and hit the enemies that are coming out hard and fast and leave the battlefield as fast as possible—*

For a different reason, Daguza too was feeling anxious. He, who was gradually moving closer to "Palau" earlier than the "Nahel Argama", caught sight of multiple enemies from the periscope, and ordered the pilot to remove direct contact with the "ReZEL" that acted as its transport. He deduced that the "ReZEL" would not be able to fight freely with the "Loto" on the back.

The "Loto" kept the foldable arms on its back and left the " ReZEL". The "ReZEL" was like a large shark to the "Loto" as it transformed from Waverider form to mobile suit form, releasing the thruster flares. Multiple Gaza-type mobile suits rushed out from "Palau", and they should be patrol ships outside the 'cove' when the collision happened. Daguza could see from the side that their allied "Complete Jegan" fired a beam rifle to hold off the enemy from closing in, and stared at the "Palau" surface that was located behind the flying rubble.

The connection shafts were severed, and the "Corolla A" took a direct hit from the hyper mega particle cannon. The billiard effect caused "B" and "C" to be knocked aside, creating this impression

of "Operation Billiard" to seal the enemy fleet inside the 'cove'. However, this was just a massive mobilization to cause a misdirection. The success of this mission would hang on whether they could break into Palau and snatch the RX-0 and its pilot. ECOAS 729 moved ahead to shoot down enemy units for them, but there were quite a lot of patrol units. There were mobile suits gradually rising out from the gap of the 'cove' that could not be sealed off completely. Despite wrecking their base, it was impossible for every ship to be moored. They had to finish the retrieval of the "Unicorn" and Banagher Links before the enemy ships leave the port, detect this and surround the area.

The pink beams suddenly flashed hitting the flying debris and creating an explosion of light. The enemies were firing intercepting shots at them. The "Loto" had no chance of winning with merely anti-air turrets even if they fired here. The pilot quickly dodged and intended to check on the enemy's location, "Ignore it!" only to be growled at by Daguza.

"Leave it to the covering machine. Where's the target signal coming from?"

(We can't detect it. Vice Commander Conroy, who was seated at the front, replied through the wireless communicator. *The transmitter Banagher Links's holding onto can send signals within 20km even with Minovsky particles around. If we can't detect him, does that mean he hasn't arrived at the retrieval point inside "Palau"? Or is there some deviation…* Daguza could only suppress his worst imaginations as he held onto the grip of the periscope again.

The fact that he was not imprisoned was confirmed by the spy's report. If he stayed at the space gate retrieval point, he should be able to avoid getting involved in this damage. What is he doing— sweat of uneasiness continued to seep out of Daguza, and he looked at the landscape of "Palau" that occupied his sights. The "Loto" skillfully managed to avoid the rubble flying over, and quickly closed down its distance with "Palau".

Part 16

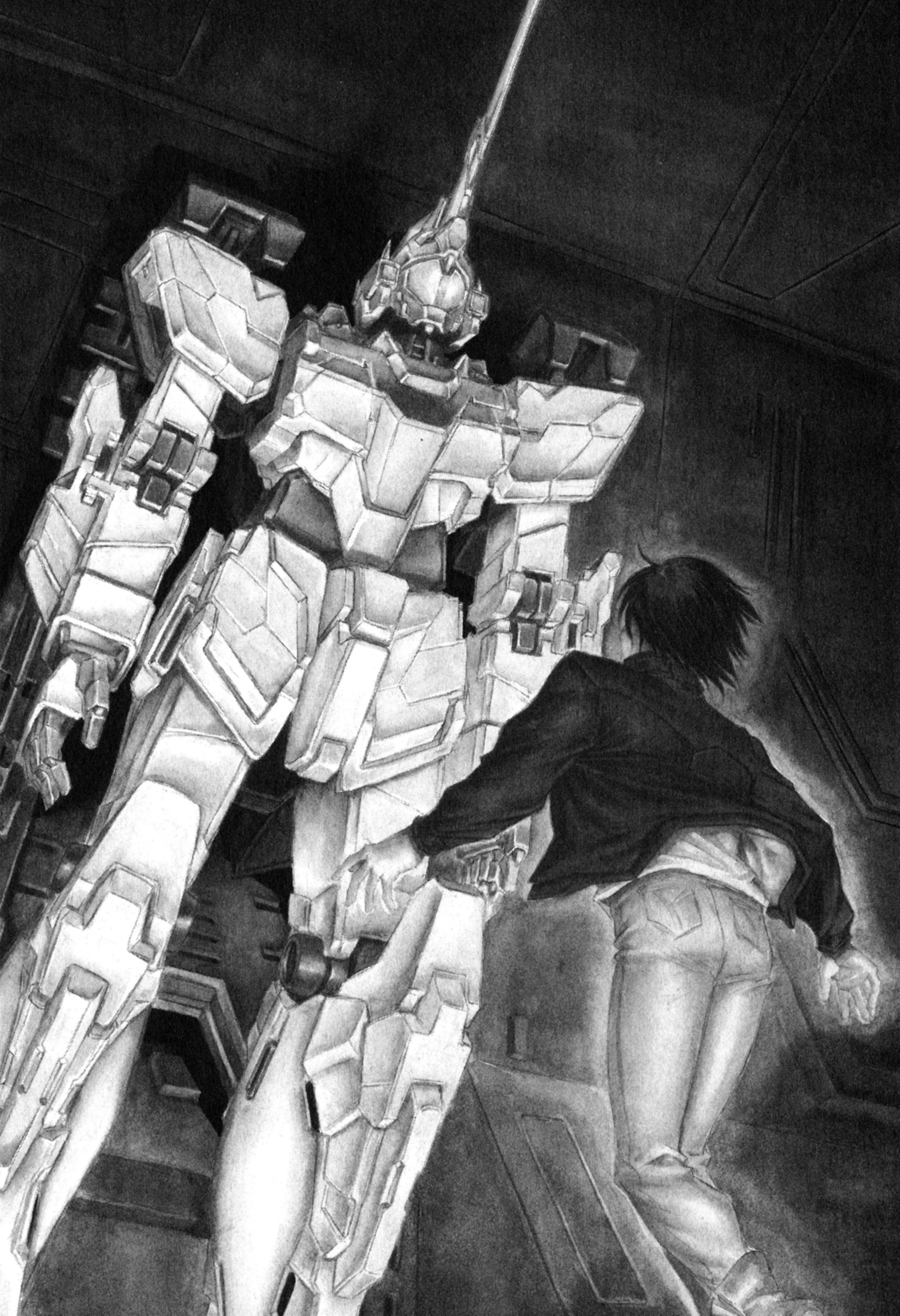
Banagher stared at the ball-point pen drenched in sweat and held it tightly. He had to press the signal switch at the appointed moment. He remembered the words recorded on the monitor sheet and checked his watch. It was 6.07pm, past the designated time.

Since the attack, I can't achieve anything even if I struggle wildly. Shall I activate this transmitter? Banagher pondered for a while, and again decided not to. It's easy to pcik me up, but the Federation's goal is to retrieve the "Laplace Box". Even if I obey the instructions , the operation won't end like this. They'll probably search through "Palau" until they find this mobile suit that is basically the key to opening the "Box"—and will eliminate all obstacles, whether soldiers or civilians.

That's why you and I can't stay here. We have to hurry up and leave " Palau". Banagher looked at a corner of the factory amidst the numerous materials thrown into the air. As the sirens and growls from the mechanics echoed, 'it' stood silently as its body remained in the hangar.

He did not know what caused this earth-reversing-like impact. Banagher heard from the soldiers on the way here that it seemed like the asteroids that were linked together crashed into each other. However, he had no time or need to find out the truth. He was lucky to sneak into the military port facility in the midst of the chaos. The target was removed from the ship and placed in this factory block where he could see it after entering. There was no truth more important than this at this moment. Even the transmitter's issue could be solved once he head outside and activate it.

There's no other way. Banagher told himself this and gave up on thinking. He hid himself amongst the containers, looked around, and waited for the moment to rush out. Smoke was starting to float in, and the soldiers were busy putting out fires and tending to the injured as they went around the factory as they did not notice him. None of them looked over at the white machine that was standing deep within, and it looked like there was a deliberate unnatural void surrounding 'it'. *There's less than 50m left, I can get up there without a wire gun. It feels uneasy not to have the normal suit, but there should be a spare inside the cockpit*—Banagher had this thought as he secretly made his decision to get up there first before doing anything else.



He took a deep breath, kicked the floor and left his hiding place amongst the containers. Banagher stepped on the floating metal frames like he was stepping on stones while crossing water, and floated up diagonally within the large factory. The “Unicorn Gundam” with its lone horn pointed up did not affirm nor deny its master’s reckless action, and the eyes hidden under the visor were just looking afar.

Chapter 3

Part 1

The red and black magma-like glow was the proof that there was a chain reaction exploding inside the 'cove'. The pulsating hot red light seeped out from the cracks, causing the boundaries 4 asteroids that crashed together at this point to appear vaguely. The scattering rubble and dust that flew with the wind was dyed a light red because of radiation, and "Palau" looked like it was burning thoroughly from afar.

Several mobile suit were basked under the same radiation light as they flew out from the bottom of the cracks. The monoeyed giants forced their way out from the gaps between the asteroids that crashed into each other in waves, and it would be appropriate to describe them as hellish devils. Nasri caught sight of an old " Geara Doga" from the pilot use periscope and squeezed the trigger of the low recoil cannons. The "Loto" with the 729 logo poked its head out from behind the rocks and fired the 120mm cannons on its shoulders.

A slight tremor passed through the machine, and the shells flew out from the two low recoil cannons. The bullet speed was as slow as a snail when compared to the sublight mega-particle shots, but it was not a problem in this distance of approximately two meters. The winged shells that was also designed to work under atmospheric conditions hit the "Geara Doga" in less than a second and blew up its body above the waist. The "Loto" let out its burner flares to move backwards before the enemy's forcefully separated

upper and lower bodies were devoured by the explosions. “FIRE THE LASER AT THE CRACK!” Nasri shouted without warning as he turned the periscope to the crack.

The laser support designator installed on the “Loto”s head fired an infrared laser. That invisible light was reflected on the crack, forming a reverse-cone shaped beam called a laser cone, and it was used to show the target coordinates to the “Complete Jegan” that flew in from above.

The “Complete Jegan” shot out the anti-ship missiles installed on its shoulder missile launchers, and lit its booster pods on the back above the cracks. Under this close distance and the laser guiding through the optical sensors, the Minovsky Particles could not block the eyes of the missiles. The large missile heads that could even be equipped with nuclear shells flew into the laser cover and hit the tip of the cone—the crack indicating the enemy’s escape hole.

White hot light expanded, and the dirt that was blown apart by the impact flowed deep into the cracks. The mobile suits that were trying to escape were caught in this torrent of debris, their limbs were crushed as they exploded, and the new impacts blew up the cracked surface. Mobile suits limbs and flames shot out together, forming a burnt furnace at the crack. The absolute zero space surrounded everything at this point, causing the melted and collapsed rock surface to freeze quickly.

With that, the slightly large crack was basically sealed off. *We just have to shoot down all the enemy units that are coming out from the crack*— Nasri glanced at the rocky surface that had frown steam

and gas as he looked for the next enemy under the periscope. They managed to seal off the main forces in the 'cove', but they still could not relax. The path leading from the tunnel to the spacegates were not covered, and they had limited ammunitions.

If we miss the timing to leave, we'll be surrounded and unable to move . "Has the 920 sent a signal?" Nasri saw their allied "Loto" moving towards the highest point of "Palau" as he let out this umpteenth prompt. "Unable to confirm." His vice commander answered with an anxious voice, and Nasri nearly cursed out.

It had been 12 minutes since the ECOAS 920 "Loto" fought its way through the 14th space gate. *Hasn't that guy reclaimed the target ?* He recalled his old friend showing an emotional face that was different from before, and suddenly felt his stomach hurting. *That most stubborn blockhead in ECOAS kept insisting on saving that target civilian in this operation. He's not a guy who'll make a wrong decision based on personal feelings, but if we want to carry out the mission of retrieving the RX-0, he has to be colder than usual when making decisions on the spot. If the situation requires for it, I may need to fight my way into "Palau" and kick that guy's butt…*

"A large number of enemies appeared at the south side! Coming in fast."

The vice commander let out a sudden voice, causing Nasri's latter thoughts to vanish. It was too early to say that they were enemy reinforcements. He held his breath for just a moment as he saw the large swarm of enemy markers appearing on the sensor range. "FIRE A SIGNAL TO THE "NAHEL ARGAMA"!" He instinctively shouted.

"RETREAT BACK TO "COROLLA". CONFIRM THE NUMBER OF ENEMIES FIRST—"

"They're here!"

The pilot let out a whimper, and the main camera monitor was immediately filled with a white light. The tremor rocked the machine, and the buzzing of the siren filled the control seat. Nasri held onto the grip of the periscope and put his eyes on the eyepiece. The remaining particles of light spread in space, and multiple enemy unit markers overlapped each other. A mobile suit that was right in front appeared on the one-to-one scaled display.

The machine did not have a serial number, only the logo " Sinanju", and instantly closed in its distance with them. Nasri aimed the low-recoil cannons at the enemy unit and stared at the CG corrected machine image. This machine gave out a red afterimage, flickering its thruster unit that was reminiscent of wings, as it flew over the "Palau" surface to them.

"The red mobile suit…!?"

Nasri let out this doubt from his mouth and squeezed the trigger. The moment the 120mm cannons were shot out, the red machine seemed to vanish from their sights at that instant. *We can't win. We've been had.* This instinct pierced through Nasri's body, but he did not even have time to think as he immediately moved the periscope to try and catch sight of the enemy. At that moment, the nightvision monitor suffered a blackout, and an impact several times that of before rocked the "Loto".

The condition monitor showed the "Loto"s CG network, and the cannons on the shoulders were flickering red. The red person got below them and used a beam saber to slice off the low recoil cannons. The AMBAC program could not correct the loss of mass in time, and the "Loto" lost its balance as it crashed onto the rocky several. Short-circuited sparks came out from the pilot seat, and the air bags that were shot out from the console covered Nasri's head.

"EVADE! BEFORE DAGUZA AND THE REST ESCAPES—"

WE CAN'T LET OURSELVES TO BE FINISHED HERE! In the midst of this tremor where he could have bitten his tongue, Nasri's voice was immediately swallowed by the heat spurting out wildly from the control seat.

The "Sinanju" swung its beam saber from the "Loto"s shoulder to the flank, vaporizing Nasri and the rest inside the control seat. in the face of the particle beam saber that melted the metal, the 8 ECOAS members kept in the infantry transport room at the back were also vaporizing by their lit normal suits and scattered into space like dust. The "Loto" that was sliced diagonally exploded, and the black corpses were vaporized cleanly without even a fingertip as the red machine was the only thing at the scene reflecting the light of the explosion.

Part 2

Angelo knew that the small machine that exploded was the transformable mobile suit the Special Forces used. It was the mobile suit of those guys who stealthily entered the civilian colony

and carried out the act of terrorism under the name of counter-terrorism—the Manhunters. He did not feel anything else about this just desserts they suffered as he stared at the "Sinanju" that appeared amidst the explosion before stepping off the landscape of the "Palau" like he was touring around. Full Frontal's mobile suit lit the light for the counterattack as the red machine flew off to find its next prey.

Wave after wave of "Geara Zulus" wielding beam rifles in their hands let out thruster trails as they followed the "Sinanju". Angelo felt unhappy that the mobile suit other than those of the escort squads were interfering in Frontal's battlefield, but it could not be helped as it was a organizational battle. He let his machine shoot out flares from its booster pod and stared at the ships waiting at the back.

The flagship "Rewloola" was at the center, and he could see the Salamis-class patrol ships and the disguised trading ships lined up , causing the ships that were putting out the flames to be covered in darkness. The number of ships that left the 'cove' and hid themselves amidst the sea of debris during these past 1,2 days amounted to about 80% of all their forces stationed at "Palau"—in terms of fighting strength, it was 95%. Most of the ships and mobile suits that were sealed inside the 'cove' were antiques that were past their usable life, and the soldiers were just a coalition of anti-government forces who had no other place to head to. Those people who came over with the idea of changing directions according to the times were just 'old blood' that should be changed . These things were tails that should be changed without pity if they wanted to break off their bond with "Palau" and let the Neo Zeon Army revive for real.

That Federation army that didn't know this and thought their attack succeeded will now see the real hell. Angelo broke ranks and looked over at the space that had become a battlefield from the southern tip of "Palau" . The rubble and Minovsky particles that were scattered everywhere meant that the motion sensors were practically useless, but they could still catch sight of the enemies within a range of 40km. The enemy units that broke into the "Palau"s anti-air range was a special specs Jegan, a transformable unit with serial number RGZ-95, and also—

"What? They only sent in such few numbers…?"

Angelo moved the unit to the "Corolla A" with the red hot surface. It was impossible to catch sight of the enemy ship's powerful mega-particle cannon, but it was impossible for the number of units covering the ship to be more than the advanced squad. Even if they counted the Manhunter mobile suits that were hiding on "Palau", that was still less than ten. He could not ignore the possibility that there were other units waiting to seize the moment, but there was no greater chance than this to send in a large number of forces to the enemy base. Angelo let the machine move through the 3 "Corollas", inspected the battlefield that was a mess full of anti-air fire, and matched the speed of the "Sinanju" at the "Calyx". On approaching, the "Sinanju" quickly raised its hand out and held Angelo unit's hand like it was pulling someone.

"Captain, I can't estimate the number of forces the enemy has. Even if we consider the strength attacking "Palau", it's still too little. There should be a main force hiding elsewhere…"

(They're aiming for the "Unicorn". It's possible to attack with very little forces if they just want to create an opening to reclaim the target. It's just as expected.)

The voice that came back through the communicator caused the doubts within Angelo to disappear quickly. *That's right, the Federation doesn't have the guts to launch a full-scale battle. This is not beneficial to them. It's because they're surrounded by so many things that they can't move properly, which is why we're going to fight the advanced squad using their own plan as expected.*— Angelo reflected on these words as he spoke to affirm, "Then, has that guy found that Unicorn yet?" Frontal moved the monoeye of the "Sinanju" sharply,

(It begins. We just need to deal with them without wearing out our forces. At the right moment, retreat.)

The voice that felt like it could see through everything rang in Angelo's ears, and the "Sinanju" broke contact before lighting the thruster unit. Angelo sent a laser signal to the escort squad searching for the enemies to order to retreat. He saw the escort squad's units give a hand signal to show that they understood before turning around, opened the slot and stepped on the foot pedal. The wings on the back swayed about like a tail, and the purple "Geara Zulu" raised the beam launcher to the waist as it got ready to take on the enemy. It accelerated like a bullet.

If that's the case, there's no need to waste time exerting our fighting strength. The Captain and I alone are able to crush these weaklings. Angelo dodged left and right and eyed the specially equipped Jegan as his first target. That heavily armed Jegan that was equipped with large missiles outside the missile launchers floated between the "Calyx" and "Corollas' That was crashed into each other. *It seems that this guy's mission is to fire missiles into the gaps*

between the asteroids that are the escape holes and seal off the 'cove' completely.

"Such a cowardly thing to do! You're planning to deal with " Palau" by using a billiard-like trick…!"

Angelo did not want to use long-ranged weapons to get rid of the enemy. He let the machine jump on a rubble, closed in on the Jegan and drew out the beam hook before the opponent could dodge. He suppressed the head of the Jegan as it fired the beam launcher, and let the machine get behind the enemy. The enemy machine turned around with the AMBAC and shot the beam rifle, but the beam could only graze past Angelo's unit head before dissipating in the air. Both sides faced each other, and the beam hook sliced neatly into the Jegan's abdomen.

The part that was equipped with multiple armor was flipped out, and the pilot that was exposed to the high heat was melted together with the cockpit. Angelo then sliced the missile launchers and let his unit leave the scene before the huge fireball was triggered. The surrounding rubble exploded, and with the remnant of the enemy unit vaporizing behind him, Angelo turned to look for the next prey.

"This is to open a way to Neo Zeon's revival. None of you can think of returning back alive…!"

Part 3

The light expanded through the bridge window, and there was an explosion different from that of a normal mobile suit's

explosion. Otto inadvertently got up from the Captain's seat " What's the matter…?" and muttered. (Juliet 5's signal got cut off!) Mihiro's voice rang in his ears.

(There're many enemies appearing from behind. The advanced squad is being surrounded!)

The sensor operator called out, and Otto turned his frozen face to the main screen in front of him. A large amount of rubble was blown out from the asteroid's collisions, and the motion sensors were basically useless; however, they could use the optical observations to detect the enemy movements. The advanced squad had just gotten close to "Palau", and an unknown large number of mobile suits came moving over from somewhere. Looking at the numbers, it seemed that the number of ships on standby at the back were not just a few. One could tell from this that there were hidden main forces beside the fleet docked at the 'cove'. The main force was in ambush, waiting for the moment because they predicted the attack from here.

Those left inside the 'cove' are just bait. It's a trap. Otto felt this understanding numb his limbs as he raised his volume, "Call the covering forces to back them up!"

"Deploy the anti-air fire. Use the dummy-rubble. Our ship will head straight in. Is there contact with ECOAS?"

(The line got cut. The laser signal too was cut after they got into "Palau".)

Mihiro transferred the reply from Operator Bellard in the second communication room as she turned her pale face over at Otto. *It's too slow.* The fake balloon were expanded, and countless fake rubble appeared, but Otto ignored them as he held onto his hands that were covered by the normal suit. *The plan was that there would be contact once they retrieved Banagher Links or the "Unicorn". Leaving aside the "Unicorn", it's weird that they haven't met Banagher yet. Has he not reached the retrieval point?* Otto checked that it had been 15 minutes since the battle started, and looked at the "Palau" that deployed its anti-air fire, only to frown because of the words he heard (We've been had!)

(The "Sleeves" predicted our action and set the trap first. They' re not an opponent we can beat by fighting head on. Captain, hurry up and give the order for our ship to retreat!)

Alberto supported his large body that was slumped into the commander's seat and continued to say such self-explanatory words as he reached his neck out to Otto. *It seems that he has forgotten that this ship is so reckless because on him. "Our allies are still in a battle. How can we retreat like this!" Otto growled back and looked away from Alberto, never wanting to meet his stare again.*

"There's a 30 minute time limit in this operation. ECOAS should be contacting us soon. Until then…"

Can we hang on? Otto swallowed the words he was about to say back down his parched throat, and exerted force on the fingertips resting on the armrests. *The engine power's back to normal. There's also the option to retrieve all surviving units and escape with maximum*

speed. If we miss the timing to leave, we might end up in a calamity where we're annihilated— Otto stared at the beams that were flashing silently, and as he gritted his teeth, (There's a new laser signal from "Palau"!) Mihiro's urgent voice rang through the wireless communicator.

(Is it ECOAS!?) Liam shouted out as she turned to the communication console. (No, this signal is…) From behind, Otto stared at Mihiro, who was stumped for words as she worked on the communication console, and saw a look of surprise on her face as she turned around.

(It's the "Gundam"!)

Part 4

The flames caused by the explosions at the back ripped apart the cracked surface as it burned wildly. Just before the shockwave could surround the body, and the scorching flames could cover the all-view monitor, the "Unicorn" flew out from the crack and flew into space.

With the burning hot rocky surface at its back, the machine lit its positional burner and dodged the rubble that was still. He had no optional equipment in his program—and randomly took portable weapon from the factory called the Beam Gatling Gun or something—and thus, the AMCAD could not work properly. Banagher tried to correct the program as he stared at the anti-air fire lighting the surroundings of "Palau". The number of beams

was less than what he expected. He could vaguely see the lights of battle through the rubble, but the mobile suits in the battle looked too be Neo Zeon units.

"Didn't they bring in a large number of forces…?"

Banagher put on the helmet and pulled down the visor. The normal suit was left inside the cockpit, perhaps because it was investigated to see the synergy with the mobile suit, but it was really lucky of him. Banagher moved the machine behind the rocks and modified the display board. He opened the Identification of Friend or Foe (IFF) window, and could find two units that belonged to the Federation from amidst the rubble and dummies on the window. The two RGZ-95 was surrounded by Neo Zeon machines.

The disadvange the Federation had was obvious even to outsiders. Banagher recalled that there were no real decent ships docked inside the 'cove'. *Does this mean the Federation got ambushed?* He just thought of this, and the siren indicating that a laser signal was received rang. The newly opened window showed the ship Banagher knew and its coordinates.

"The "Nahel Argama"s here too? What's going on…!?"

He could not be mistaken with this signal that was tagged with the mothership. The battleship that was severely damaged and had Audrey and other non-combatants on it would be the one leading the charge in this assault—no, it might seem that this was the only ship sent over from the number of mobile suits that were deployed. Banagher did not feel that this was feasible as he

intended to catch sight of the ship's silhouette flying in from the top, but felt a bone-chilling pressure striking him from behind.

His hairs were on its ends as his body started moving on its own to move the machine away. At that moment, a mega-particle came flying down from above, and the countless rubble that came with the explosion rained on the "Unicorn"s back.

The machine left the surface and adjusted its position. Banagher caught sight of the machine that came flying over from amidst the scattered rubble. It was a mobile suit with the AMS-119 machine serial number, a unit of Neo Zeon registered with the name of " Geara Doga". "Please stop! I have no intent of fighting!" Banagher continued to cry out as he subconsciously worked on the weapons and removed the safety of his portable rifle. The "Unicorn" wielded a long Magnum Gating Gun that replaced the personalized beam rifle that was depleted, and pointed that 4-barreled gun at the "Geara Doga". The crosshair overlapped on the monoeyed unit that was rushing over, and the alarm indicating lock-on rang.

"LET ME GO! THE FEDERATION WON'T RETREAT IF THEY DON'T RETAKE THE "UNICORN"!"

But even as he shouted, it was impossible for him to tell the enemy pilot this. The glowing monoeye gave a killing intent, and Banagher moved the shield equipped on the left hand to the front. The shield that was automatically deployed from an I-field barrier, twisting the beams the "Geara Doga" shot out from. The scattered beam bullets hit the landscape at his feet, and the rubble that flew and those that mixed with the wind covered the "Unicorn". Just as

the all-view monitor was covered by dust, Banagher sensed the " Geara Doga" moving behind him and pointed the Gatling gun over there. The I-field would not have effect if it was not a beam attack from the front. If he were shot from the side, he would surely be massacred—

"DO YOU FEEL THAT IT'S ALRIGHT EVEN IF YOU TURN " PALAU" INTO A BATTLEFIELD!?"

Banagher yelled and exerted strength on the fingers on the trigger. The 4-barreled gun turned and blew apart the beam shots that were of a higher output than a machine gun. The "Geara Doga " had mega-particles rained on it before it could even adjust itself, and it became a real beehive as its thoroughly battered machine exploded. Banagher inadvertently saw flames shoot out from the arms that were ripped over, looking like it was trying to grab space as it opened its hands.

"Why did it end up like this…!?"

To Banagher, there was no difference between enemy or allies. He just wanted to get rid of the seeds of battle, but caused a new sacrificed. The uneasy feeling inside his stomach came out in a voice, and Banagher turned his eyes away from the remnant that was instantly vaporized. *You're already a part of it.* Marida's words echoed in Banagher's mind, and the chilly feeling spread on his skin where his hairs stood.

Part 5

What occupied the sight on the entire view of "Palau" was not a scene of two armies fighting each other toe to toe. There were anti-air fire appearing and lots of explosions, but those were all rubble and dummy balloons, and it was practically impossible to detect mobile suits exploding. The enemy squadrons in ambush showed no signs of moving aside as only two enemy units were moving about enthusiastically, seemingly toying with the "ReZELs " that entered the perimeter. As for the 6 enemy machine silhouettes that were launched, it was unknown if they were launched to sneak the "Nahel Argama" caught on the sensor. The other covering units were sent to support the advanced squad, and the mothership was the only thing left at this point—

Amongst the assumptions he thought of before, this would be considered the worst. Riddhe punched the display board and groaned, "Damn it!"

"We fell right into the enemy's trap…!"

They could not retreat even if they wanted to. Including the ECOAS unit, their side lost three units, and the situation was such that the "Nahel Argama' could not even defend itself on its own. Their plan was to let their machines move forward and create a perimeter against the enemy, but if he move all the way there, he would lose the chance to leave the battlefront in the end, and this understanding caused Riddhe to hesitate on what he should do.

In another sense, there's no better chance to execute the plan than this, but if even the fighting strength of the "Delta Plus" was lost, what will happen to the "Nahel Argama"? A battle isn't decided on a mobile suit

such that it can overturn the situation, but if I escape, the chances of the ship's survival will definitely decrease. As a pilot in charge of protecting a military resource, and as a human, this is something I definitely can't allow—but on the other hand, there's something I can do and I have to do right in front of me.

Riddhe's thoughts took a roundabout. The duty and responsibility a person present should have was just a sense of realism that had weight in this ideal, and he could only hold onto the control stick without aim. "Please go!" This voice came from behind right at the moment the enemy squadrons were scattered to two sides.

"Don't worry about me. Just fulfill your duty."

Mineva spoke. This voice seemed to see through everything, " Bu, but…!" and Riddhe was at a loss of words.

"If we try to push ourselves too much here, we won't be able to reach our destination. It'll be pointless for us to return back to the " Nahel Argama"."

Mineva did not say anything else as she merely answered with an unwavering stare. This bitterness of trying to find an excuse rose up in Riddhe, and he had to look away.

"…The enemy's Neo Zeon, you army! Are you really fine that I fight against them?"

"I won't think that it's fine, but that's my problem. You have your duty and responsibility to fulfill."

Riddhe felt that Mineva's words were deliberately trying to tell him not to use her as an excuse as their eyes met. Mineva, who was clinging onto the assistance seat at the back, had already accepted this current situation in front of him. She left her life to him, seeming prepared to be blamed for all of eternity.

Riddhe did not want to disappoint her like this—no, he did not want to be mocked by her like this. Such a thought rose rapidly in him, shaking his body that was stuck at the spot. Mineva probably did not like a man who would think of what happened after and hesitate over the present. He did not have the will like Mineva, and had no belief that he could show decisiveness, but hoped that he did not give a wrong impression to her. That was her shtick, and Riddhe acknowledged in his mind that he may had been toyed by this woman of Zeon as he continued to stare at her eyes.

"You'll probably regret for the rest of your life if you turn back now. Please follow your heart. If you make a decision from the bottom of your heart, I'll accept it no matter the outcome."

She finished, and her emerald eyes looked as sturdy as crystalline jade. He had no chances of winning her. Since the beginning, this girl barged into the Vist Foundation alone, and showed what she was made of when she became a hostage for the Federation. "I really have to hand it to you…" Riddhe mused as pulled down the helmet visor. *I may have really fallen for an unbelievable woman.* He again realized this.

"The anti-G resistance on the assistance seat isn't complete. It's not going to be as easy to deal with as a roller coaster ride."

"Right."

"Once our allies start retreating, I'll immediately leave the frontlines. Sorry for making you accompany me till then.."

Mineva fastened her body on the assistance as stared at the space that became a battlefield. *I really want to say that I'm being played by a woman. How can I bear such heavy things like duty and responsibility with logic alone?* Riddhe managed to clear his doubts, and he felt relaxed in his heart as he turned his face to the front. *Just got to fight it out.* He muttered deep inside his heart and stepped on the pedal.

BOOM. The shockwave that was like an explosion came from the force of the thrusters at the back, pushing the machine forward . Riddhe read the attack pattern on the monitor as he turned the control stick forward, turning straight down as he transformed the "Delta Plus". The humanoid turned aside and immediately broke its shape and formed a spacecraft-form waverider. The forward of the enemy forces were detected by the motion sensors before they could get used to the sudden dip in angle before it went from moving down to moving forward.

The enemies seemed to be a modified version of the "Geara Doga", the newest model of main forces the "Sleeves" had. Riddhe could see two similar type machines moving on standby behind this lead machine that was headed to the "Nahel Argama", exchanging shots with the "ReZEL" Romeo 010. He read the situation through the through the markers that were flying all over the place, and deduced that this "Delta Plus" alone would be enough as he first aimed at the two mobile suits behind. He let the

machine turn around, dodge the beam shots that came flying over from the forward unit, and squeezed the trigger of the beam rifle located above the unit.

The waverider's firing state was right in front of the unit unlike how it was with the rifle. The beam went by the forward unit and mere grazed the left top side of the machine, but it was enough to divert the enemy's attention. He pretended to be providing covering fire for the allied machine as he caught both the attentions of the machine that turned abruptly and the forward unit.

The G-force that struck up the feet wore down on Mineva, causing her to groan in agony. Riddhe's sights were covered by the cheeks that rose up, but caught sight of the monoeye of the forward unit in front of him. Riddhe's machine continued to rush into the battlefield without slowing down, and he transformed into a mobile suit before collision. The beam sabers formed its blades, and the crosshairs gave the alarm indicating lock on before Riddhe pressed the attack trigger down completely.

The slash that came sliced the arms of the forward unit together with its weapons. The forward unit lost the parts under its arms as it was unable to maintain balance, and immediately went to the back. Riddhe exhaled a moment later after having gathered all his concentration for that moment, and yelled "NOW YOU HAVE A REASON TO RUN AWAY. GO BACK!" He then aimed at the next enemy. The two machines scattered and left the Romeo 010 that lost its arm, and riddhe saw another machine with a beam hook coming right at him.

This attack looks like it was coming from the bottom, but it's actually trying to get to the back. The enemy pilot's thoughts entered Riddhe' s forehead, causing him to immediately stop in his tracks. The " Delta Plus" turned half a round and manipulated the beam saber in its left hand to intercept the enemy's attack. The particles from the clashing blades let out sparks for just a moment, and the "Delta Plus" used the recoil to flip and deal a strike right at the enemy unit's waist. The multiple layers of armor melted, and the beam saber sliced off the movable frame, creating a vibrating feeling inside the cockpit. However, there was a sharper killing intent that came stronger than this vibration, shaking Riddhe's senses.

The remaining unit attacked one he stopped. Riddhe was prompted by this killing intent that was closing in, and did not even take time to aim as he raised his beam rifle to shoot. The mega particle beam that was released pierced through the "Sleeves " unit right from the front, and the expanding fireball lit the deep grey color of the "Delta Plus". Riddhe shook off the debris that scattered and let the beam saber stop working before leaving the scene. The enemy unit that was sliced apart by the beam saber gave out sparks and was crushed by the impact as it slowly floated in space.

"Amazing…! Did I just take them all down?"

Three units down once I sorties. Is it the "Delta Plus" abilities or the strong power of the Goddess of Luck that I'm able to showcase such fighting abilities. This joke-like development caused Riddhe to remain for a moment. "Another one from above!" Mineva's voice

rang, and Riddhe immediately dodged. A thick and large beam then came right down from above, and the scorching hot particles were sprayed on the "Delta Plus".

There was a second, third shot that came flying over, and obviously, they did not from a beam rifle, as they were high energy output beams that was on a beam launcher's level. Riddhe indicated that he wanted the Romeo 010 to move back, and squeezed the trigger to fight back while estimating the enemy's location from the line of fire. The optical sensors caught sight of an enemy suit that was closing in, and the CG corrected image showed a purple machine on a wide window. This mobile suit had its data entered since the last battle with the "Sleeves", and it was a special specs machine with booster pods on the back. "Lieutenant Angelo's "Geara Zulu"…!" Mineva murmured as her expression changed.

"Someone you know?"

"He's the leader of the escort squad, a very dangerous man. Be careful."

The beams continued to rain down on Riddhe as it anticipated his dodging, seemingly backing up Mineva's words. Riddhe did not even have the time to transform as it took him a lot of effort just to duck under the fire. The sublight blocking his way let out afterimages, closing in slowly on the "Delta Plus" as he remained restrained. The malice that was stickier than hostility descended on Riddhe, causing him to have goosebumps.

Part 6

It was an enemy that was looking for its next prey and felt like it was time to hold back. The machine itself could not be found in the database, and the unique appearance caused Angelo's blood to boil.

"That Gundam-like machine…!"

Angelo let his machine move down behind the beams, and closed in on the relative distance to the enemy. The optical sensors caught sight of this enemy unit the moment they clashed, and it looked like a "Gundam" without horns. The machine was a dark grey color, but it was definitely a variation of a Gundam-type. *The Federation wants to keep using that White Devil legend that has a tail and make us recall the past humiliation again and again!* Angelo was motivated by his agitated nerves as he continued to squeeze the trigger of the beam rifle. The enemy unit intended to keep its distance, but was unable to remain steady, and the beams that were shot back left empty light axis in the middle of this pitch darkness.

"I won't let you get away even if you want to transform and escape. If you're a "Gundam", fight like one—"

The 4-barreled grenade launcher equipped inside the shield was fired, blowing up the path the enemy unit was headed to. Angelo used the moment the enemy unit hesitated due to the fireballs and slowed down to pull the beam hook out and shoot its booster pods .

"Die after you fight once!"

The particle blade in the shape of a sickle went right at the enemy unit's abdomen. *It'll hit.* The numb face showed a smile, and at that moment, a flash appeared right in front of him, blocking his sights. The rain of bullets hailed down, and the machine got caught in the shockwave as it was blown behind.

"What the…!?"

Angelo immediately let the machine steady itself, and looked over at the all-view monitor that was spinning less and slowing down. He saw a white machine with a thruster flare closing in on him fast. The automatic camera took a photo shot, and the enlarged version of it appeared on the window. The CG corrected image of the lone horned mobile suit was instantly etched in Angelo's sights. It was wielding the Beam Gatling Gun with both hands, seemingly waiting for a moment to fire a second time.

"…I see. So you want to make things tough for me like this?"

It was the boy who saw Frontal's true appearance and forced him to do a shameful thing. The RX-0 marker overlapped with Banagher's face, causing him to forget all other things.

"How bold you are…!"

The tail stabilizers on the back rose up like a tail, and the "Geara Zulu"s beam launcher was aimed right at the "Unicorn".

Part 7

The animosity and malice that came from the purple mobile suit rocked Banagher's heart like it had a physical hardness. The intention automatic system detected Banagher's wavelengths, causing the "Unicorn" to ignore the manual controls as it went side by side. The mega-particle shots came flying over a tad late, and the beam that was dodged at the last moment was reflected on the white armor.

"That purple guy's scary…!"

The delay time it took to show the killing intent before the shot was almost zero. If he made a mistake here, even the "Unicorn"s interface would not be able to negate the damage. Banagher did not have time to fight back with the Beam Gatling gun as he focused on the purple machine. The Federation unit that was fighting the purple mobile suit from before appeared right beside him.

"Is that a new Federation model?"

It was an unregistered machine, but it could be identified as a Federation mobile suit from the clean streamlined contours. The pilot had the beam rifle at a position where he could fire readily, but he hesitated as he let the machine float around. Banagher thought that the mobile suit was waiting for the "Unicorn" to take action. A pulse suddenly started to rise deep within Banagher's heart, and as his consciousness was attracted by that thing for several milliseconds (Where are you looking at!?) the voice came from the wireless communicator, hitting his eardrums.

The purple machine that got to his feet struck up from below. The "Unicorn" reacted to the direct killing intent by half and round, and despite deploying the I-field barrier on the shield, Banagher's consciousness was too slow, causing the machine to lose its relative reaction speed. A beam of light came radiating out from the purple mobile suit, and the shield that could not block from the front directly was blown aside. The base of the shield cracked due to the impact, and the purple mobile suit used the opportunity presented when the "Unicorn" lost its protection as it closed the distance completely.

A beam blade appeared in his spinning sights. There was no time to adjust. Banagher's brainwaves made this snap decision as he let the "Unicorn" draw out its beam saber.

"Tch…!"

It was a click of a tongue, but also one that could motivate him. He exhaled, and the machine was manipulated into wielding the grip and swing right down at the enemy. The purple machine too swung over, but the particles that were gathered in the form of a hook missed as it cut the space. In contrast, Banagher could see the "Unicorn"s saber being absorbed into the purple machine.

The beam launcher was raised to the front in place of a shield, eating up the extremely hot beam blade. The purple machine immediately let go of the long and thick cannon in its hands that was sliced and melted into half, but the distance to dodge the triggered explosion was still too close. The purple machine pulled the cartridge belt-like connector away from the backpack, and the beam launcher was sliced in half and floated in space for just a

moment. The internal generator exploded and formed a huge fireball, and the purple machine took the heat and shockwave as the boost pods' jets were blown aside weakly.

Got him— But it was not a fatal blow. Banagher let the machine steady itself, and looked around for the purple machine that left the sensor range. He had already activated the transmitter the Federation spy gave him, but there was no definite proof that the other side could receive the signal in space combat. He had to hurry up and reach the "Nahel Argama", but he would not be able to talk if he did not fight back the purple unit. Banagher had the feeling that the purple machine would insist on fighting him no matter what as long as he did not shake off that person. He recalled the killing intent that was formed, the presence that was overly sticky, and recalled the voice of the pilot that remained in his ears, only to hear an approaching alarm ring out of a sudden, shocking him.

The IFF response window opened, indicating the coordinates of a Federation unit. Banagher understood that it was the new Federation unit from before, and a familiar voice rang in his ears (Banagher! You're Banagher Links, right!?), causing his mind to go blank.

"Audrey…?"

Banagher let out a hoarse voice as he looked behind at the new model that was closing in. The Gundam-like new model suit was gradually becoming clearer in front of his eyes, and he felt his

chest fluttering even strong as he subconsciously let the "Unicorn" machine turn around. The new machine raised its left arm that had a large shield on it and grabbed the "Unicorn" on its left arm.

(Are you alright? Banagher? It's me, Mineva…Audrey Burne.)

Banagher had no reason to mishear the voice that came through the speakers. "Audrey…is it you, Audrey?" He leaned forward from his linear seat and stared at the new mobile suit. (That's great that you're fine…!) this voice came from the mobile suit without horns, but had the face of a "Gundam", making Banagher feel that he was talking to a giant.

"Why're you at such a place…are you piloting it?"

(No. I'm the pilot here, Ensign Riddhe Marcenas. You remember the model plane you caught before?)

The man's voice entered the channel. Bnagher recalled the plane model in his mind and the expression of the young officer pursuing it, but it could not help him understand this situation. The new model left Banagher alone as he was unable to understand the situaton and could only look back blankly; it faced the "Unicorn" and opened the cockpit cover.

The hatch deep within then opened, and the normal suit with its back facing the lights of the cockpit snuck out. It was impossible to tell the physique from the heavy-type normal suit, and it was impossible to see who it was as the face was covered by the helmet visor, but Banagher managed to feel it from the presence within. She actually showed herself on the battlefield in space. "That's too

reckless, Audrey!" Banagher chided as he expanded the window and moved the cursor over to the helmet of the normal suit.

He could see the bright energetic eyes sparkling under the visor . Those were the emerald eyes that indicated the start of everyone. Audrey's eyes caused the nerves on his body to resonate and the passion to engulf his heart and body—

(There's no time, Banagher, so listen up. After this, I'll ride on this "Delta Plus" to Earth with Ensign Riddhe.)

Those eyes of hers were staring at Banagher firmly as she let out an adamant voice. *Why must you do this?* Banagher responded as he did not wait for his mind to clear, and Audrey's voice continued, (This is what I decided after thinking).

(The Ensign's father is a senator of the Senate Council, and a Central figure of the Space Migration Act. I intend to meet him and tell him everything about this. I want to settle this peacefully as a person who inherited the Zabi heritage—)

At that moment, an arm reached out to grab Audrey from behind and pulled her into the cockpit forceful. Banagher too pulled the control stick without waiting for the cockpit to close, and let the "Unicorn" move away from the new mobile suit called the "Delta Plus". An object flew in at a high speed right at the last moment, passing between the two units. An explosion of light was than emitted less than a meter away.

It's that purple guy. Banagher turned his back on Riddhe, who seemed to detect the same thing, and the "Delta Plus" he was

piloting. He caught sight of the enemy from the sensor and hailed suppressing fire on it. The purple unit skillfully dodged the continuous fire of the Beam Gatling, drew out a rocket from its shield and loaded it into the launcher. The launcher that was at the waist let out a small spark, and the rocket was fired out as it closed in on the "Unicorn", triggering a flash of explosion that ignited from close range.

The "Delta Plus" fought back with the beam rifle amidst this unstable situation. The purple unit continued to glide in space, dodging the fire as it continued to load the rockets. The "Unicorn" adjusted itself and raised the Beam Gatling gun. (I know you'll be confused because it's too sudden.) Banagher heard Riddhe's explanation through the communication channel.

(But I'll bear the responsibility of protecting Mineva…Audrey. It's not easy to do this, but we've already tried our best to think of a good way to settle this. Please understand.)

(You should return back to the "Nahel Argama". As long as you return with the "Unicorn", the Federation Army will retreat. First …)

The fireball of explosion exploded beside, and the noise that got heavier covered Audrey's voice. The impact shook the cockpit, and the scattered bits hitting the armor let out clear metallic sounds. *What in the world are they saying?* Banagher felt puzzled as he did not understand what was going on, and even though he had the feeling that he was being betrayed, he continued to search for Audrey's voice amongst the channel as he kept the "Delta Plus" ferrying her in his sights.

He was right beside her, but he could not touch her. They could only give fleeting looks to each other, and he had no way of asking what her true intentions were. *Why didn't I get out of the cockpit and meet her?* This regret tightened his chest, torturing his body that was being manipulated by the G-force.

Part 8

The purple "Geara Zulu" lost the weight of the beam launcher, and it was a lot more mobile than before. It showed off its unique trait as a long-ranged support machine as the large boost pods on the back, and it continued to follow no matter how Banagher and co tried to shake it off. They shot through a dummy balloon that expanded to the size of a mobile suit, but this was unable to fool the eyes of the pilot. The "Geara Zulu" with the commander blade antenna continued to cut down the dummies in its way. The large anti-mobile suit rocket, the Strum Faust was fired out from the handheld launcher, causing the dummy balloons caught within the explosions to dissipate immediately.

Despite losing the stability of its posture during this challenge, the "Unicorn" continued to raise its Beam Gatling gun and fired, trying its best to restrain the enemy's action. The way it fired the shots had the flair of a novice, but there was no sense of fear in his action. He however felt that the machine wanted to move forward to attract the enemy unit's attention. Even though he was scared, he hung on. With their glances at the unit with the monoeye, Riddhe calmly fired the beam rifle in quick succession, covering Banagher's back.

He realized that with Mineva on board, the “Delta Plus” could not fight as it wished. He should have told Mineva what was on his mind, but in this situation, it was impossible to grasp everything through limited words. She herself hoped to understand everything at least—this unknown emotion created an impulse, and Riddhe squeezed the trigger of the beam rifle until its maximum. The purple “Geara Zulu” dodged the fire and shot out a new Strum Faust.

The “Unicorn” and the “Delta Plus” were forced back by the impact of the explosion, and the interface opened automatically. (Audrey, just tell me something). Banagher’s voice rang within Riddhe’s ears.

(Is what you’re going to do what you have to do? Or is it something you wanted to to?)

The unexpectedly calm voice caused Mineva, who’s seated on the assistance seat, to shudder. After an instance of silence, she answered, “It’s something I want to do…I think.) Banagher’s reply then came in with the noise amidst the approaching sirens (I get it) .

The “Geara Zulu” waved its beam saber to slice down the dummies and got behind the two machines from their feet. The “ Unicorn” skillfully used the AMBAC’s functions to change its position as it contacted the “Delta Plus” behind with a formal tone. (Ensign Riddhe!)

(I feel you’re a man of your word. I’ll leave Audrey to you.)

Riddhe had no time to answer. The "Unicorn" immediately broke contact with the "Delta Plus" and let out maximum output from the back boosters as it flew towards the enemy unit. The beam Gatling let out a sharp trail of beams, forcing back the purple "Geara Zulu". Flashes of explosions occurred, and Riddhe stared at the sparks of the beam sabers clashing with each other. At that moment, they felt so distant from him; the battlefield in front of him and Audrey, who held her breath in anticipation. Numbing words were the only things echoing in his head.

The outdated words kept restraining his thoughts unconditionally. *You're just a kid. What big words are you spouting there? Why are you so open-minded? I never showed any sense of trustworthiness here—*

"Such moving words…I don't have a chance of winning here."

There was a sense of heat that he never felt before, rising within his chest and expanding within. Riddhe ignored Mineva, who frowned in doubt, and turned the "Delta Plus" away.

Riddhe continued on to transform the mobile suit into the wave rider, and at that moment, he only considered about how to leave the battlefield. "Ensign, Banagher's still…!" Mineva protested, but Riddhe had no intention of caring about it.

No matter how sharp this girl was, this was the only thing she definitely would not understand. That was because Banagher set a curse on him in a way only a man could do. "I understand." He mused and looked forward.

"This is a matter between men. Please don't interrupt."

To her, this might be the first time in her life she was told off with a commanding tone. Mineva closed her half-opened mouth and lowered her silent face. Riddhe could no longer move forward or retreat, and experienced that he bore the fate of the person named Banagher as he turned the unit to "Palau" that had dust surrounding it. The anti-air fire was obviously decreasing, and the bright lights of the battle on the back observation window shone intensely into his eyes as a result.

Part 9

The Federation unit that transformed into a fighter jets flared its thrusters on the back as it hurriedly moved away. Angelo wanted to pursue it immediately, but was blocked by the bullet screen that was in the shape of a fan, and shuddered before he felt angry.

The ideal bullet array was to use the unit as the axis and spray the beam bullets out, and the "Unicorn" understood how to use the Beam Gatling gun in less than a minute of fighting. It managed to maximize the effectiveness of the armament it was not equipped , and even bought time for the new Gundam-type to escape.

"Those two Gundam planned this beforehand…!"

Considering the time the two units interacted with each other, it would be impossible for him to be so adept at this so quickly. *What kind of composure does this brat have? Angelo used up the last Strum Faust, threw the launcher at the "Unicorn" and let the "Geara Zulu" fly*

over at it. Right when the beam hook was about to materialize completely (Lieutenant Angelo, can you hear me?) A calm voice came from the wireless communicator.

(Retreat back to the "Rewloola". Let Ensign Marida be the " Unicorn"s opponent.)

Frontal's voice came from beneath the noise, and Angelo's mind that was gushing full of blood calmed down. "But…!" He tried to argue back for a moment, "I should have told you the plan, have I not?) the voice interrupted Angelo's attempt to argue back, and he stopped the vibration of the beam hook.

(The "Kshatriya" is heading there now. This is something only she can do.)

Angelo stepped on the foot pedal and raised the ball-shaped control stick to move above the "Unicorn" as it raised a screen of bullets, looking for the coordinates of his ally unit on the motion sensor.

It was the NZ-666 "Kshatriya"; while the other allied forces were retreating, this was the only mobile suit being indicated on the sensor, moving closer. There was a sense of presence that that was beyond electronic signals, engulfing the sensor screen. Angelo looked back at the "Unicorn" that looked bothered as he continued to retreat, and had the anger of a prey being snatched away reigniting within him as he looked forward and said, "Roger that."

"…It's a job for Cyber-Newtypes, huh?"

He accidentally blurted it out in his anger, annoying him. The Newtype Research labs were used to create artificial Cyber-Newtypes for military use. In the past, it was said to be used for research on ways to create Newtypes, but in fact, they were experimenting on lab subjects that would not offer any ill consequences—said to be mostly underaged war ophans—as they ignored the ethics of life.

Their research ranged from injecting drugs, forcing ideals on them, manipulating and rewriting memories to manipulating gene composition to improve their respiratory functions. The results of them manipulating the human mind and mental capacity were that they simply created a bunch of useless people who were addicted to drugs. They managed to obtain decent results in their research during the Neo Zeon war later on, but the emotionally unstable human-like weapons that were developed easily became double-edged swords. It had been a long time since the Federation and Neo Zeon ceased such research, and, looking at the significance of how official records did not leave any traces of this, it could be said that Cyber-Newtypes was a shameful history that was erased by Man after the war.

Most notable was Marida Cruz, who inherited the best gene samples that were 'enhanced' and specialized in high mobility combat. It was said that she was at a level where the other Cyber-Newtypes could never ever match. *So we'll let a monster handle a monster?* Angelo glanced aside at the RX-0 that was becoming distant and mused to himself as he navigated the unit's trajectory to the southern tip of the "Palau".

Frontal's "Sinanju" too was gradually returning back to the southern tip to gather with the fleet. *Everything's proceeding as planned*— yes, this was a battlefield enacted out under Frontal's plan. As for what kind of nature the monster that devoured the " Laplace Box" would show, their side just needed to watch it from the other side. Angelo managed to more or less appease his unhappiness as he looked at this abnormally shaped mobile suit that bore this responsibility. The "Kshatriya" was not limited by the massive bulk that was several times that of an ordinary mobile suit as it skillfully turned around and passed by the "Geara Zulu"s feet.

Part 10

Marida activated the binder that was just repaired, and let the machine turn around. The front left binder was the only one amongst the 4 binders flapping, and it managed to stop the " Kshatriya" from turning sideways any further.

The controls felt a little light, but it was not bad in any means. Marida had no need to deliberately activate the calibration system as she got used to the AMBAC functions. She then used the sub-arm hidden inside the binder, which was destroyed together with the binder in the last battle, and the base unit part had to be replaced. It quickly extended out, and the fingertips did a hook. CRAK CRAK. The sound entered the cockpit in the form of a tremor, and Marida knew that the unit was repaired.

It's really lucky that the Psycommu isn't damaged. Marida again had this thought. At this moment, Neo Zeon did not have the

technology to build the Psycommu frame, and the spare parts of the "Kshatriya" only consisted of ordinary mobile suits alone. The reactivity of the unit would be reduced by half once the Psycommu frame installed around the cockpit was damaged, and they could not repair it at will later on. This 'spare part' and this one and only unit were all built from lost technology—to what extent would she face off against this opponent that was built from a Psycoframe? Marida expanded the monitor window, directed the cursor to the CG corrected lone-horned body and cautiously closed in her distance with the "Unicorn".

The "Unicorn" did not commit the foolish act of letting the enemy corner it from behind as it raised the Beam Gatling while retreating steadily, showing that it was observing her actions. *The weapon in its hands is newly developed for this "Kshatriya" here,* Marida gave a wry look as she looked right at the white machine that was intending to slip away from her sights. *Did he randomly take this when he was intending to take the machine out of the factory? It' s really something that nonchalant-looking boy with keen foresight would do; to be able to use his sharp instincts to grab such a powerful weapon.*

(I don't know how that brat got hold of the "Unicorn", but there 's one thing I know now, and that is we can't let that machine fall into the Federation's hands.)

Zinnerman's voice could be heard amongst the noise from the " Garencieres", currently at a rear side of the fleet. Marida exhaled and removed her wry look.

(You can destroy any other part as long as the cockpit core in intact. Your top priority is to secure the unit. Don't think about the pilot.

The soft voice proved that Zinnerman was concerned about the pilot, or perhaps he was considering the fact that they would have to fight him as their opponent. "Understood. I'll secure the unit as priority." Marida answered without any expression as she ceased all meaningless thoughts. If possible, she would capture the unit without any damage; if not, she had to rip out the cockpit's core without even the pilot was crushed. Marida herself had no hesitation no matter who it was on board. There was no need for an *Artificial Being* to spend time thinking about it.

Even till now, Marida found it hard that Banagher Links, that boy with puppy-like earnest-looking eyes was the pilot of the " Unicorn". At this point, there was no clear explanation as to what sort of thoughts he had, and what methods he used to reach the ' cove', but the fact remained that the "Unicorn" joined the battle. Marida looked through the machine's specifications, and knew that she would be massacred if she did not go all out. She could only accept this situation, face it and try to deal with it. if she could do it well and end things properly, her failure at "Industrial 7" would be negated. She did not have any honor and pride worth protecting, but she had to erase the black mark on Zinnerman[Master].

"There isn't any just war, is there…?"

Even though she tried to conceal these words within, such personal thoughts still leaked out. If only humanity could have

Gods, there would be as many Gods as Man. Justice would not exist in this case, and righteousness might not be the only thing that could save humanity. No matter what the thing saving humanity was, the Cyber-Newtype, an artificially created being, no other means of beliefs to rely on, and there was no need for her to change—Marida shook aside the image of the boy's face she saw in the chapel and looked forward with an antagonizing look. She accelerated the "Kshatriya" by boosting the thrusters to the maximum and started to close the relative distance with the " Unicorn".

Part 11

The transported goods were filled inside the large bucket and sent onto the rail of the electromagnetic catapult. As the bucket reached the end point, the contents would be thrown into space. This would be a crude way of explaining things, but it was the working principle of a mass driver.

The transported goods that were thrown out would pass through space through inertia, and the mass catcher at the destination would receive it. The mass catcher was a round cone-shaped thing 100m long in diameter and 150m long, and it resembled a funnel safety net. The transported goods would be covered by a bag made of fiberglass, and it would be shed away when the goods flew into the mass catcher. With that, only the contents would be left within the funnel. Thus, it was possible to carry out zero costs space transportation other than the operating fees of the facility and the disposable bag. Obviously, this facility was not suitable for transporting humans or delicate machines, but

it was fine to make the transport a little more rough if they were sending mineral resources. Thus, the Moon would have such a facility as a frontline base to build space colonies, and to mining colonies like “Luna Two”, a long rail required for a mass catcher would be imperative.

“Palau” was no exception in this case, and the mass driver was located on the front of the bow-shaped “Calyx”, with 10km’s length of rail protruding into space. The mineral rocks that were excavated would be sent onto the rail in order and fly to the mass catcher in Side 6 as part of the mining process. The “Delta Plus” shook off the pursuit from Angelo’s unit as it head towards “Palau ”. At this point, what appeared in front of it was the triangular prism supporting the mass driver rail.

The rail was extended out from the mining tunnel, supported by numerous pillars that rose out from the rocky surface, and the endless high frame remained unmoved in the midst of the darkness. Riddhe cautiously let the “Delta Plus” float around with the units that were basically turned to dust and close the distance with the rail. The scattering winds picked up bits of fine particles, and looking over, it was not easy to distinguish between the floating rubble or the mobile suit rubble. The debris that were floating around the mass driver was abnormally more than usual amongst the rocks that were not launched successfully. The “Delta Plus” moved along the pillars that were 2km tall at maximum and reached the side of the rail, stopping its relative velocity in front of the access panel for maintenance use.

The left manipulator hand reached for the panel screen, and a sensor cable was shot out from the part that was basically the base

of the thumb. The cable that shot out like a whip approached the panel screen, and the universal-use access panel opened its connectors automatically as the front tip of the sensor cable was connected. The computer immediately started reading the information and sent the data of the mass driver over to the cockpit of the “Delta Plus”. The launch acceleration, the transport bucket launch schedule and the current trajectory were revealed. “ How is it?” Mineva asked, unable to catch up the values that were scrolling dwon in front of her. Riddhe ignored her and stared at the data for several seconds and answered, “Right, looks like it can work” and turned his brightened face at Mineva.

“It’s just as I guessed. The direct hit from the hyper mega-particle cannon redirected the course. We’ll be able to reach Earth like this.”

The original setting of the trajectory was directed to the Side 6 mass catcher, but at this point, it was redirected to Earth. The “ Delta Plus”, which used up a lot of its thruster jets during the battle just now, could not reach Earth on its own, so this would be a great relief to it akin to recovering a lost train ticket. They just had to let the machine ride on the transport bucket and prepare for the countdown before they launched to Earth. If the access panel was not locked, they could probably let the control system from here.

Mineva could not help but feel relieved. She would have lost her chance to escape if she was brought back onto the “Nahel Argama” again. Riddhe opened the visor of his helmet and wiped away the sweat on his forehead as he showed a relieved expression, uttering out, “We might have gotten some of that guy’s

luck too" jokingly. That guy—Banagher Links; Mineva deliberately restrained the pricking pain in her heart as she looked at the space on the other side of the rail that had become a battlefield.

The situation was reduced to an extent that only anti-air fire appeared from time to time, and there were basically no signs of beams or explosion lights. Amidst them, Mineva detected a glow that was sharper than the stars, and the killing intent were all gathered at a point in space. She reached her hand out at the all-view monitor to stare at that spot.

The killing intent continued to gather, racing amongst the starry sea as thin beams crossed each other. What Mineva saw was not a normal battle between mobile suits. There were flashes of funnels' fire, and the one on the other side, dodging the attacks and firing back with beams was the "Unicorn"— *a "Gundam" said to be built for fighting Newtypes.* If not, it would be impossible for the unit to dodge the funnel attacks that were swarming from all directions.

As far as Mineva knew, there was only one person amongst the "Sleeves" who could control the funnels. The hand touching the monitor tensed up as Mineva continued to stare at the flashes of light despite wanting to look away. Marida was fighting against Banagher, and she sealed her heart while fighting, her killing intent reaching out to this place. If she could use that kind of power properly, she could have realized that Mineva was at this place.

"What is it?"

Riddhe said as he looked behind and gave a probing look at Mineva as he stopped the hand that was changing the mass driver settings. *He's really too concerned for others.* Mineva felt annoyed "It' s fine…" as she looked away.

"Hurry on to the next step. We have nothing else to do."

Mineva diverted her focus away from the killing intent that remained and looked in front. There was an endless darkness appearing in front of the long rail. Mineva did not look at any expression Riddhe might have on his face as he continued work, and focused on looking at the path deciding her destination. The the battle between the "Kshatriya" and the "Unicorn" showed no signs of ending, and the icy cold stare continued to sparkle in a corner of Mineva's sights.

Part 12

ZAA. These sounds were let out as the small cannon pods surrounded the unit. They were like metal sand attracted by a magnet, sticking onto him no matter how he tried to shake them off, and would let out swarming attacks from all directs without stopping.

"These guys!"

Banagher continued to squeeze the trigger of the Beam Gatling without aiming and turned the "Unicorn" to the side. The automatic cannon pods that moved into the dead angles let out beams at the same time, and the fan-shaped bullet screen

interfered with the mega-particle bullets, creating chains of sparks. As the flashlight-like lights continued to radiate, Banagher saw the source of the automatic cannon pods fly above his head. The 4 binders opened up like petals, and immediately got right below the linear seat.

"It's that 4-winged, huh…"

It was the abnormally shaped mobile suit that brought about calamity to "Industrial 7", and it was blocking the path in front of the "Unicorn" like it switched with the purple unit that retreated. *I should be making contact with the "Nahel Argama" as soon as possible.* Banagher anxiously squeezed the trigger, and the automatic cannon pod that got behind it attacked like it was mocking him. The "Unicorn", which lost its shield and the protection of the I-field, felt a shock, and a killing intent that came right below pierced through Banagher.

The "Unicorn" Intention Automatic System responded, and it turned 90 degrees as it pointed the gun at the source of this killing intent. At that moment, an automatic cannon pod that got diagonally below gave another hit, bending the Beam Gatling gun that took a direct hit. Banagher immediately let go of the weapon, but he could not evade the threat of the explosion that expanded from zero distance. The anti-glare filter could not reduce the flash that lit the cockpit, and the machine took the shockwave as it rattled.

"You!"

That four-winged rushed into this flash, lit its monoeye and struck from below. This killing intent blew through the cockpit, and Banagher felt the wind pressure nearly peel his scalp off. The " Unicorn" automatically drew the beam saber that let out particles and hacked right at the saber of the 4-winged horizontally. The colliding sparks exploded, and the large frame of the 4-winged grazed above him. Suddenly, there was a sweet aroma mixed within the killing intent.

"What's going on…?"

It was a sweet fragrance that surrounded his body, a complete mismatch for the skin-crawling killing intent. Of course, that was because a girl's sweat smelled sweat—

"Miss Marida…is that you?"

These unexpected words came out from Banagher's mouth, and he felt his throat tensing up. He did not know why, but he could conclude that this sweetness belonged to Marida. This was the scent he smelled from her in the detention room on the ship and the silent chapel. The four-winged looked like it was in no mood for negotiations, but there was that defenseless silhouette hidden within. The eyes that resembled the deep sea color of Earth, the eyes that looked like they contained a gentle light when she smiled , they were looking at him from deep within the thick armor—

"Miss Marida!? If it's you, please listen to me! This is Banagher Links!"

The small automatic cannon pods were two meters long, and as they were too small, they could not be picked up on the motion sensor as they gathered a large amount of killing intent and closed in. Banagher detected an opening from amidst the multi-direction ball-shaped attack that was showing signs of disorder, let the machine swing the beam saber and stepped on the foot pedal.

The automatic cannon pods seemed to scatter in doubt. There was a sign that the 4-winged mobile suit in front was retreating. "I' m right…!" Banagher mused as he used this momentum to step on the pedal and let the "Unicorn" rush towards the 4-winged.

The normal suit sensed the G-force coming from below and hardened the jelly-like fluids within into a metal-like state. Banagher's upper body was held in place tightly, but it could not prevent his blood from rising up, which caused the blood vessels above his neck to expand. He endured the pressure as his pores felt like they were spurting out blood, and shook off the pursuit of the automatic cannon pods as he got right at the four-winged clutches. As the "Unicorn"s left arm was about to touch the heel of the opponent, the four-winged quickly flipped, got behind and was about to swing down the beam saber in its hand.

There was no time to activate his beam saber. The "Unicorn" turned around, but it was too late as the beam saber was right in front of Banagher's eyes, and a shock that nearly caused him to bite his tongue rocked the cockpit. *Am I killed?* Banagher could not even let his nerves close his eyes properly as he merely felt his lower body relax, and saw the monoeye appearing on the all-view monitor.

The opponent let the emotionless monoeye move under sharp Mohawk-like head like it was intending to observe Banagher's action. The 4-winged pretended to swing down its beam saber as its 4-wings were just restraining the "Unicorn" body. It was unknown when the sub-arms were deployed as they reached out from below the binders, grabbing the "Unicorn"S limbs. "Marida —" Banagher realized that his unit was being sealed off completely as he was about to open his trembling mouth. At that instant, the 4 -winged placed the grip of the beam saber it was wielding onto the flank of the "Unicorn", and the heavy sound of metal crashing into each other rang within the cockpit.

(Surrender, Banagher Links, or I'll burn the entire cockpit down.)

A monotonous voice rang, and the beam saber that was resting on the abdomen rattled the cockpit with loud noises. "Miss Marida …! Why're you—" Banagher eked out his voice, (I should have said it before.) but felt a chill down his spine after hearing her respond with cold words.

(Once someone rides on a mobile suit and enters the battlefield, he can only be considered a fighting unit called a pilot. Whoever it is sitting inside, it has nothing to do with me.)

The cockpit let out an unsteady resonance as the beam saber's grip remained in idling state. (Cut the main generator, and get out from the cockpit—) and Banagher ignored her words as he argued "Even so!"

"Even so, you're still Miss Marida to me. I do apologize for running away on my own, but I can only do this. You don't want "Palau" to turn into a battlefield, right? The Federation army will retreat once they can take back this "Unicorn"."

(That's just the enemy's view.)

The 4-winged binders that resembled a beetle fluttered as the hidden sub-arms holding the machine shook it. "LISTEN TO ME!" Banagher yelled as he held on tightly to the linear seat that was rocking unsteadily.

"Audrey…your princess has returned back to the battlefield. She rode on a mobile suit to stop this battle—"

On saying this, Banagher's back suddenly froze. *You idiot, why did you say so many unnecessary things?* He cursed himself in his heart, and Marida's voice got sharper, (The Princess' here?), and Banagher clicked his tongue inadvertently.

(I'll take the Princess back as well. Where's she?)

The 4-winged used its large body as a pivot as its hidden arms shook the "Unicorn" unit twice, thrice. Banagher felt the tremor that felt like his brain was being meshed up, and he tried to pull the control stick and stepped on the pedal to leave. The thrusters on the back let out flares, and the moveable frame let out a shrill rubbing sound. The "Unicorn"s raised its arms slowy, and in an

instant, it pulled aside the hidden sub-arms that resembled an insect's legs. However, the 4-winged quickly used its main hands to grab the "Unicorn"s head.

The 5-fingered manipulator hands that were held down tightly were held down tightly, and the head with the lone horn was tilted back. The all-view monitor let out noise, and the malfunction windows continued to appear. If this kept up, the machine would be snapped, "MISS MARIDA!" Banagher yelled out, but his voice was half-buried amongst the buzzing alarms.

"Please just think about how to end this battle! Tikva and the rest may get involved in it!"

(Then just surrender and tell me the Princess' whereabouts so that our army will retreat too.)

I can't do this. Banagher immediately had this thought as he asked himself, *Why?* (Do you see?) He continued to listen to Marida's words while at his wits ends.

(You keep saying that you just want the battle to end, but you're thinking from the enemy's viewpoint. That's because you're already a part of things here.)

"No! You're the one wrong here! It's because your thoughts are too straightforward that Audrey wouldn't stay there. I feel I can't hand over the "Box" or Audrey to people like you because…"

(I said that's the reasoning of the enemy!)

The hands were pressing down on the 4-winged, and the overload sign showed up on the condition monitor. The frame continued to let out a rattling sound, and Banagher felt like Marida was seriously trying to destroy the "Unicorn" as anger stronger than fear exploded within him. *You pretend not to see it even though you can see it. That's a power you're exerting stubbornly after sealing your heart. You of all people know that brute force alone won't be able to solve anything here—!*

"YOU'RE REALLY UNREASONALE!"

Red phosphorus light glowed through the armor gaps, and the moveable frame the expanded aside nocked back the 4-winged hidden sub-arms. At the same time, the leg frames popped up and extended, and the movable armor slid aside, shaking aside the hook of the hidden sub-arms.

The lone horn split into two, and the face cover that rose up knocked aside the manipulator hands of the 4-winged. The thruster nozzles on the back let out a burst of flares, and the machine that shook off the restrains of the hidden sub-arms finished its transformation as it lit its pair of matching 'eyes'.

("Gundam"…!?)

Marida's muttering faded far away, and arms came out of the headrest, fixing Banagher's helmet in place. There was a slight shock from the arms and ankles, and Banagher realized that the anti G-force drug delivery system "DDS" was already activated as he let the "Unicorn" move above the head of the 4-winged.

The stinging fragrance spread in his nose, and the heat flow of the brain pulsating rushed throughout Banagher's body. The black impulse rose within him, and the nervous system that was in sync with the machine had been dyed just like tar. *Not good,* Banagher thought, but his rational sense that was trying to think could not work as he already viewed the 4-winged in front of him as an enemy. *It's pointless to talk further against an enemy who just want to overpower through force. I'll have to beat this person here to ensure that Audrey can return back safely, and that I can get back to the "Nahel Argama". Don't think I'm just a pushover here—*

The flickering "NT-D" logo shone through the helmet visor, dyeing Banagher's sights red. The vaguely drifting sweet aroma scattered, and Marida's scent vanished from the cockpit.

Part 13

"NT-D activation confirmed. The target's now fighting with the "Kshatriya"."

This voice came from the operator seated at the communications console in a corner of the "Rewloola"s standard bridge. "Good." Frontal answered, and his voice echoed down from the tall ceiling. His tall and lanky body that was draped in bright red was standing beside the captain's seat.

"This Psyco Monitor isn't perfectly effective. Focus on the signals from it, understood, captain?"

"Understood." Captain Hill, who was seated on the captain's seat, answered with a calm expression on his head. This would

definitely be the only chance for him, the captain of the “Rewloola ” to show off his skills as he could only remain at the back, watching the battlefield while his subordinates did not even have the chance to perform. “Warm up the main unit first. Our ship will head out from behind “Palau” based on the situation. Take care not to let down your guard against other units.” Angelo passed through the bridge door beside Captain Hill who raised his volume. He minded about how he walked in in the normal suit drenched in sweat as he stood beside the red figure looking up at the main screen.

The screen displaying the optical visuals showed the two mobile suits clashed in a deathmatch. The crude would let out beams of light from time to time, but it was impossible to see the silhouettes of the mobile suits. It was impossible to tell whether the “Kshatriya” or the “Unicorn” had the advantage, but the details of the battle did not matter here.

The necessary information would be transmitted from the Psyco Monitor installed on the “Unicorn”s Psycommu—a Psycommu receiver device. This tapping installation would activate the moment the NT-D was activated, and would send the details the unit gave in large amounts. As the waves that were sent were released from the Psycommu, there was no worry about the Minovsky particles interfering. The sending range was limited, but they should be able to gain complete unmistakable information. In fact, the sub-monitor of the communication monitor was already collecting information at a high rate, and started probing into the Laplace System that was activated together with the NT-D.

The coordinates that was suspected to indicate the location of the "Box" was shown before. Then, what would be the content be—Angelo swept his sweaty bangs that were hanging on his forehead and looked at the binary files that were being rolled in, but a certain roar "WHAT'S GOING ON!" caused him to raise his eyebrows. Zinnerman, who was dressed in a normal suit, was holding a helmet on one hand as he rushed into the bridge.

Zinnerman ignored Captain Hill, who was shocked as he looked back, and let his body float under zero gravity to the Captain's seat. *So he came?* Angelo saw the rage within the black eyes, and was blocked by Zinnerman in front as he stood in front of Frontal. "Captain, did something happen to the "Garencieres"? Frontal gave an interested look at Zinnerman, who glared back at him and roared, "WHY DID YOU LEAVE MARIDA ALONE!?" The gruff and heavy voice echoed through the bridge, and everyone present stared at Zinnerman.

"I heard that you gave the order to the entire army to fall back. Why is Marida the only—"

(To activate the NT-D, we'll have to let beings that are similar to Newtypes clash. This is a job only Ensign Marida can do."

The overly simplified explanation curbed Zinnerman's momentum as he frowned. "The "Unicorn Gundam" has a Psyco Monitor installed on it." He said quietly as he looked back at the main screen.

"Once it's activated, we can obtain new information from here. Since we can't analyze the Laplace Program, it will be faster to let the Program unseal itself. For this aim, I guided that boy Banagher to the "Unicorn". I'm really sorry to hide it from you too."

They used the Federation spy, planned it such that Banagher would ride on the "Unicorn", and prepared a program that would start reading once the NT-D. This assault might have granted Neo Zeon a new rebirth and helped sweep away the 'Old Blood' of unease within their camp, but they had to fool even insiders thoroughly in order to complete this program. From the investigations up till their point, they knew that the NT-D system could not be fooled by a mock battle. It would be impossible to activate the NT-D unless it was a real battlefield with lives on the line.

Is everything on the battlefield an act Frontal planned— Zinnerman seemed to have this understanding as he turned pale. "But Marida. ." and his vague voice showed no signs of ending. "I understand." Frontal answered and lowered his head slightly.

"The Cyber-Newtypes are those with their nervous transmitting system upgraded through artificial means, and they can't be considered pure Newtypes. But Captain, what exactly are pure Newtypes?"

Zinnerman swallowed his words and remained silent as he gave a doubtful look at the face wearing the mask. Frontal did not care about the other party as he turned his stare to the screen and said, "No one can answer it."

"Are they people who have exceptional senses such that they can cause the Psycommu weapons to work? In terms of effect, Ensign Marida can be said to be a Newtype. Then, the NT-D will use this phenomenon as basis to determine the opponent as a Newtype and use it's original power."

The hard lights and shadows could be seen crossing each other on the zoomed footage caught, right in front of the stare under the mask. Both giants continued the dance of death as they tried to kill each other, not knowing if the perpetrator planned this. Beside him, Zinnerman stared at the screen too, and Frontal gave a mystical-like smile on his lips.

"That "Gundam" hasn't showed its real form yet. We'll have Ensign Marida draw out its real nature."

Part 14

The funnel that was shot down became a fireball, and the shockwave scattered in all directions. Marida wanted to flip the machine at the last moment, but it could not dodge the "Unicorn Gundam" that came rushing in while cutting through the explosion of dust and gas that occurred.

The enemy unit fired its Vulcan guns, and two trails of fire grazed the "Kshatriya". Marida continued to dodge as she checked the positions of the deployed funnels as she passed her intent over to these Psycommu installations to shoot from behind the " Gundam". The nearby funnels immediately lit their burners to adjust and shot out beams from their tips. At this moment, the "

Unicorn Gundam" did a roll, let out a flash from its burners, and disappeared from Marida's sights like a scene in an action movie. The funnel beams crossed the vacuum, and the "Kshatriya"s thick green machine floated in the darkness.

"Stop dodging around…!"

Marida muttered, and she stepped on the pedal. The "Kshatriya " went full throttle as it followed the "Gundam", and the G-force that came pressurizing from above caused her flesh to tremble about. The blood vessels contracted, and the blood that was pressed down by the centrifuge force remained where it was. The 12 organs inside the body supporting the heart pulsated to grant a steady blood supply to the head. The body of flesh that was designed for high mobility combat shuddered, and the nervous system was quickly processing the movements of the "Unicorn Gundam". The enemy's acceleration and sharp turns were not usual—but her eyes were gradually getting used to it. There was not much improvement in this direct movement that had the flair of an amateur compared to the fight she had at "Industrial 7". Marida deduced that she could win if she attacked calmly.

Speaking of which, it was impossible for an ordinary person to last so long under such conditions. The enemy was not even a professional pilot here. If this amateur really blurted it out accidentally, it meant that he did not say this in an irresponsible manner. There was a need to hurry up and wear out the "Unicorn Gundam" and reclaim Mineva who seemed to be nearby. Zinnerman had always been protecting Mineva Zabi as he placed his dream of Neo Zeon's revival on her. Even though he never said it before, he had always viewed reclaiming Mineva as his top

priority. Marida herself did not have any interest in Neo Zeon's revival, but her master's wish would be her wish, and her master's enemies would be her enemies. Marida had to do what she must do even if she had to sacrifice her life. To Marida, who gained life as an artificial being, there was no philosophy she exalted more than this.

Speaking of which, Zinnerman would probably tell her that this was not right. *You're not an artificially-created thing, you're a person. Decide where you want to go. He would probably say such things, and because of this, I have to live on as an artificial being. I have to become a humanoid weapon that makes use of this body that had its genes manipulated for battle and protect Master. There's no way I'll be able to repay him, and I can't repay the thing that save me, that thing Master called the 'light'—*

"…This will be over!"

This thought process lasted for less than a second. Marida saw through the "Unicorn Gundam"s flight path and let her thoughts control the 16 funnels through a voice. The automatic cannon pods that received the commands of the thought waves moved as if they were dragged, and the "Kshatriya" fired mega-particle cannons from its torso and the binders. The sublight bullets that were refracted through the I-field flushed in from all directions like a tap with the stopper pulled out from the faucet at full stream, raining down on the "Unicorn Gundam" that was moving around at high speeds.

The burners located all over the body let out flares, and the " Gundam" machine did an emergency turn. The funnels that first

got over in front of the “Gundam” tried to shoot out beams as it intended to force the machine into the other funnels range as they were aligned in a sphere. The “Gundam” sensed the perimeter that was formed with killing intent, and the next term would be the crucial moment. The thruster lights continued to flare, and Marida saw that the “Unicorn Gundam” was moving in the direction it predicted beforehand before sending the attack thoughts to the funnels that were on standby.

The pink beams crossed a certain point, hitting the thruster vane on the back of the shins. Just when the second hit looked like it was going to hit the machine that lost its balance, the right shoulder armor got crushed first, and the Psycoframe that was revealed after the shedding let out a bloody luminescent light. In less than a second, the funnels surrounded this machine that was spinning under such force and lost its control. Marida deliberately chose not to aim at the generator as she shot the burners and the thrusters to nullify it. She gathered the sight of all 16 funnels into her consciousness, and as she turned this expanded instinct into an attack, the machine of the “Unicorn Gundam” suddenly shot out a ‘presence’ that seemed to form a giant wind that had a physical effect, flowing right at the cockpit Marida was in.

It was impossible to imagine that this came from the pilot within there. The ‘air’ that was now filled with powerful antagonistic intent passed through the normal suit, ruffling Marida ’s sweaty skin as it blew behind. The feeling of a rotten slug passed through her body and dug in—the sealed memories rose up Marida’s throat, and in an instant, she could not tell which direction was which any longer as she could only gather her attack thoughts to the funnels. However, the funnels remained unmoved

as they surrounded the “Unicorn Gundam”, waiting silently with no signs of moving.

It felt like time stopped. The enemy unit, surrounded by the funnels that were floating weakly, continued to let out this overwhelming ‘air’ as it stared at Marida. *You dare to hurt me*— a thought, not from the pilot, but an arrogant and merciless thought pierced the membrane of Marida’s mind, and as the ‘existence’ that felt like it was pulsating nearby spread through the vacuum, the “ Unicorn Gundam” raised its right hand slowly.

The 5 fingers that were opened let out an invisible wave, causing the funnels that were still remaining to let out their burner flares. They then moved according to the “Gundam”s fingers, and turned around with their cannons pointed at the main unit, the “ Kshatriya”.

The matching eyes reflected the glow on its Psycoframe as they turned red, flickering like they were making a mockery. *The “ Gundam”s the enemy*—this thought appeared in Marida’s mind, and at that moment, the “Unicorn Gundam” swung down its right hand, causing the funnels filled with antagonistic intent to attack Marida.

サイコフレームの光を引き移し、赤色に転じた一対の目が嗤うように揺れる。《ガンダム》は敵――。（本文より）

The beams then came firing out from the cannons, and multiple beams were aimed at the "Kshatriya". Marida immediately dodged and tried to gather her thoughts on the funnels, only to be shocked that she could not plot out the funnels' paths. Marida did not know where the funnels were. Due to the wave interference of the "Gundam", the Psycommu lost its contact and control of the funnels' locations.

"What's going on, funnels? Can't you recognize me!?"

The funnels that lost their sense of self were firing the mega-particle cannons, pecking at their mother bird "Kshatriya". A graze caused an impact to rock Marida, and her face that was buried inside the safety airbag. She could only release the expanding the mega-particle cannons reluctantly. The sublight scattered shots came flying out of the chest, and the two funnels that took direct hits let out explosions of light. The "Kshatriya" turned its back on that light and sliced the funnel that was closing in. Marida let the machine rush out of the array and turned her sights at the source of this wave that was surrounding her.

"You bastard, what did you do!?"

The "Kshatriya" ignited its thrusters at full power and got behind the white unit. The "Unicorn Gundam" remained still at that spot in space, not moving at all. It raised its arms up and spread them out wide, and the attachments installed on the arms became beam saber grips. The two grips were located at the cuffs supported by the arms, and the front of the "Gundam"s arms showed sharp blades of light.

The arms that became beam sabers extended out from both left and right side, and the machine immediately moved, disappearing from Marida's sights. Marida blinked in astonishment as she looked around through the all-view monitor, but the impact that came from right below immediately caused her to scream. The starry sea that filled her sights moved, and immediately, the sight of the sliced binder tip appeared right in front of her, gradually moving away from the body. The "Gundam" did not let go of this opening. While the "Kshatriya" stopped and turned around to fire the mega particle cannons, it slashed right that the enemy and dragged a trail of red phosphorus light over the enemy's head.

The beams that came raining down from all directions caused the machine that had the sabers molded together with it to leap as if it were dancing. The mega-particle cannons beams were dodged easily, and the enemy got into a dead angle and shot an icy cold wave at Marida's bag.

Marida shot out a dummy balloon, something she had never used before, and used it to hold off the enemy figure that was hacking at it like a wild wind. She knew she was being toyed with, and felt a chill from it. This movement was different from the " Gundam" before. It was reading Marida's movements completely as it slowly but surely tortured the "Kshatriya", and its thoughts were reaching Marida's skin. It was a thought that had cold delight mixed in it, one belonging to the joy of a hunter—

"Who…are you?"

Banagher Links' silhouette did not appear there. There was no sense of anger or madness, and the "Gundam" that transformed

into a hunting machine sliced off the dummy while the funnels supporting it wore down the "Kshatriya" armor. Marida screamed as she saw the funnels gather together to form the shape of a giant hand. *The "Gundam"s the enemy, the terrifying enemy that took away our light.* The memories buried within her inherited genes exploded, and a certain person called Marida reverted back to its original state—

Part 15

That abnormal scene could be distinguished despite the blurry optical images. As everyone on the bridge held their breaths in anticipation, Angelo continued to stare at the main screen with horror.

"Is that…something that brat's doing?"

Zinnerman continued to stare at the stiff lights and shadows that were dancing, muttering with a look of utter disbelief. Angelo had no disagreements about this. *If this were that guy's ability, I would have been shot down during the battle before.* "That's far from the truth." Frontal said.

"Once it deems the enemy as a Newtype, the machine's limitations would be removed, and everything from the movement controls to the weapons controls would be controlled by the system. The pilot here would not even be a system software here. It plays the part of receiving the thought waves and converts them into antagonistic intent."

"Then, what the heck's controlling that "Gundam"!?"

"Why, the NT-D. The Newtype-Destroyer System."

Frontal said nonchalantly, and Angelo gulped the saliva in his mouth as he looked at the side of Frontal's masked face. "Destroy …?" Zinnerman asked back, frowning.

"That lone-horned will detect the thought waves of the enemy, while the "Gundam" would be in charge of destroying it. What we see is an interface that uses the Psycoframe to carry out cadence that far exceeds human limits, and also, a hunting machine that's equipped with the ability to control enemy Psycommu weapons. This Program was created to exterminate the last greatest fable Zeon left behind, Newtypes."

"This is too ridiculous…it's impossible for normal humans to pilot such a machine."

"That's right. The pilot has to be enhanced. This isn't a machine a Newtype created by artificial means can pilot, but that a real enhanced being can do."

The deliberate voice caused Zinnerman, who realized what was going on, to give a tense look on his face, "I see. So it's a product of technology used to purge Newtypes. In that case…"

"It can bury the fable of Zeon completely." Frontal followed up and continued, "They wanted to dissolve the Zeon Republic and the Newtype fable together with the 100 year anniversary, and use this to wipe off the nightmare called Zeon completely. As habit, they call this the UC plan."

UC was an abbreviation of Unicorn, and also, it signified the Universal Century itself. The nightmare that caused the first 100 years to be stained in blood called Zeon shook the foundation of the Universal Century from its base, so they had to remove this nightmare before they welcomed the next hundred years. The theory of evolution human kind would have after entering space was just a fantasy, and the so-called Newtypes were just monsters with ridiculous amounts of fighting abilities. The sayings that Newtype perceptions were outstanding were just rhetorics, and they could overpower it through the power of science and technology. To prove this, a Gundam-type mobile suit would be most fitting. It was a symbolic existence of the Federation, and up till this point, the "Gundam" was a machine that could not be separated from the Newtype fable. Mobile suits with "Gundam" appearances were being mass-produced as part of the Federation army's realignment, and the power of science alone would be enough to exterminate the monsters. There was no method that was more effective than this political propaganda if they wanted to erase the "Newtype" theory. They would imitate their forefathers who single-handedly built the Federation organization, and this would be the time to take great strides and push for massive changes, all in the name of making sure that Earth would be at peace at the Universal Century's 100 year anniversary-

Neo Zeon, which was raised as a separatist, tried to maintain an economy that could not last without war on one hand; while on the other hand, such forces were allowed to continue existing because of this trail of thought. Angelo felt that this was not something a sane person would do, and looked horrified at he stared at the "Unicorn Gundam" on the other side. It was a

monster born out of the fear of the Newtype theory and Zeon, the source of it. *To think the Federation's fear for us is so deep…*

"Cardeas Vist installed a mechanism on that monster and left the key to opening the "Laplace Box" to it. Even the activation conditions of the NT-D were modified, so if we want to finish out its true identity, we can only activate the NT-D and let it remove the seal gradually."

"…In other words, you want Marida to be a sacrificial pawn here!?"

Zinnerman summoned back the killing intent that once faded and gave an ominous look in his eyes. "This is only something she can do." Frontal emphasized as he stopped Angelo from trying to stand in front of him.

"The Ple series have their hatred and animosity to the "Gundam " ingrained within their consciousness. She's the only pilot who can draw out the "Unicorn"s true nature and fight it."

"But Marida's—"

"Ple Twelve."

The words interrupt sharply as Frontal stared right back at Zinnerman. "That's her name. She's an experimental model codenamed serial number 12 amongst the line of artificial Newtypes that were cloned and genetically modified."

The mouth that was half-opened, wanting to argue back, closed again, and Zinnerman averted the other person's stare as he clenched his fist. "Even so, I understand you'll say that she's a person." Frontal said silently.

"But it's dangerous to put exceeding emotions on her. If the Ple series lose their master, they would be unable to ensure their sense of self. Sometimes, this would create a sense of dependence on the master, especially someone like Ensign Marida who lived through several cruel years for a female—"

"Don't say it."

This was a sharp voice that sounded like a knife was placed right at the back of the neck. Angelo glanced back at Frontal's expression as he stopped, swallowed his saliva, and glared at Zinnerman, "You dare to be insolent to a superior…!" Zinnerman did not say anything as he suddenly reached out to grab Angelo on the collar.

"It's because it's a superior officer that I'm saying such things. It 's not that easy if it's you."

Zinnerman reached his thick arm and pushed Angelo into space . Angelo managed to launch on his feet immediately, but he had no strength to argue with Zinnerman, who was giving an ominous look, and could only retreat back behind Frontal, who remained silent and unmoved. Zinnerman looked at them for quite a while, and turned his sights back to the screen where lights of battle were occurring. He suppressed the emotions that were about to explode

out right at this point, and his expression that was more serious than usual caused the atmosphere in the bridge to become heavier.

Part 16

Everything and anything became bloody red through the reddish-black filter; whether it was the 4-winged that was attacked by the automatic cannon pods it released or the dummy balloons that would be crushed the moment the beam sabers touched it. This was not due to the alert image shown on the visor. Perhaps this would be the blood below Banagher's eyes filling his sights, and he recalled someone telling him this, that the eyes were the weakest organs against the G-force. *Who exactly said it to me—*

This thought was just a little pebble mixed in between amidst the surging impulses. *Destroy the 4-winged and eliminate anything that's giving off antagonistic intent.* Banagher hurriedly moved the "Unicorn Gundam" as the intensity of the impacts kept shaking his organs. The slashes that crossed by sliced the knee armor of the 4-winged, and the machine that was spurting out conducting fluids spun about in an ugly manner. The left hand was already severed, and the binder with its armor ripped off could not function as per normal. However, this person did not intend to stop resisting. Whenever there was an opening, it would reach out the hidden sub-arms and swing the blade of its beam sabers at the "Unicorn Gundam"s chest.

—The "Gundam"s the enemy!

The monoeye of the 4-winged flashed as it accepted the consciousness of the person within. *That's too straightforward,*

Banagher argued in the corner of his mind. *It's because you guys are giving off antagonistic intent like this that everything became like this, not just what happened to "Industrial 7", but also forcing me to ride on this thing and take part in this battle.*

The "Laplace Box", the Vist Foundation, Neo Zeon, everyone keeps promoting their beliefs and ideals; they wouldn't even listen to anyone else. Nobody wants to listen to me, no one wants to be on my side. Dad's dead, Audrey's gone, why must I bear all these troubles? Why must I suffer such terrifying things alone!? All I want to do is to save Audrey. Why am I still at such a place even when I left Audrey in another guy's hands—!?

The "Gundam"s folded arms expanded out sideways as it sliced off two hidden sub-arms the enemy reached out. The 4-winged staggered back slightly, and the automatic cannon pod array surged forward. They had lost all power in their batteries, but it did not matter to him. *Go on, wreck the enemy!* Banagher muttered silently in his mind, and the automatic cannons that were afflicted by this destructive impulse started to charge at the 4-winged.

The impacts of the sparks appeared, and the 4-winged that was desperately swinging its beam saber staggered as it tilted. The tattered binders were overlapped in front of the body, and the 4-winged that was reduced to a short and stout humanoid figure continued to be knocked back by the funnels. Banagher realized that his lips were curling up as he let the "Unicorn Gundam" rush right at the enemy. The machine spun like a top as it touched the 4-winged, and the 4-winged's hand wielding the beam saber was knocked back into space.

The 4 beam cannons on the torso were also hacked apart, and the machine that lost its almost all its weapons bent backwards. Banagher looked at the enemy that could not use the AMBAC function and had its last sub-arm sliced by the cross-beam sabers. He used this impulse to aim the cursor at the cockpit of the 4-winged.

There was a source of antagonistic intent from within the cockpit cover, unnerving him. The nerves that were on the same length as the sensors captured the position, and the Psycoframe got right in front of the 4-winged as it reflected the pilot's will. The "Unicorn Gundam" cleared off the conducting fluids and broken bits of armor around it, and just when it was about to stab the beam saber through the cockpit, there was an 'air' that came fluttering out of the machine, letting Banagher know it was a sweet aroma that was teasing his nose.

This is a smell I recognize. The moment he thought about that, a soft flash appeared around Banagher's forehead, and time stood still. Everything stood still, from the 4-winged that remained exposed defenseless, the beam saber that was about to stab through the cockpit, and even the particles that were forming a shot that was released. The light glow that radiated at his forehead reached forward. That light mixed into together with the a'ir' released by the 4-winged, forming a 'forcefield' that surrounded the two mobile suits. This 'forcefield' removed the bloody color in Banagher's sight and expanded out together with the soft light—

—Light…!

Someone called out. A girl's voice? Perhaps it's my own voice. That might not be a voice if I look at things further. The 4-winged in front of him was basked in light, and the antagonistic intent clinging onto the skin faded away like fog as the existence within the enemy's cockpit closed in on him. *What's going on? Who's intending to enter my body?* Banagher could only look around as his head was fastened on the headrest, and he saw the linear seat with light behind it.

—You're the light that came to free me. Have you came to receive me?

Marida Cruz was seated on the linear seat weakly, giving a weak smile right back at Banagher. to him, the profile of the girl reaching her hand out to him was like a girl of around 10 years old .

—Who, are you?

Banagher too reached his hand out to the girl smiling back at him on the other side. The light dipped, and their thoughts were immersed into the bottom of the icy cold water as though the water surface was blown apart.

Light. A white light that was just born.

Banagher saw the white and transparent light that was shown on the surface. The feeling gradually rose from his body as it left the empty depth. The hand that reached out from the water surface immediately felt the cold air from the outside, and Marida felt an unknown hand pull her up. This was the first time she felt human warmth…

"Welcome to this world. Do you feel cold?"

The blond boy that reached his hand out smiled at her. The neat room that was surrounded by white light had several casket-like capsules laid out, and it seemed that she was obtained from one of them. Banagher looked at the face of the young man wearing a Neo Zeon uniform, and Marida felt a chill from this young man's expression that was colder than the surrounding temperature.

"You're the 12th sister. Your sisters are working outside. Come together with me to the outside world."

The boy held her hand, and it felt warm. Marida got up from the capsule and as her bare foot that touched the outside air

touched the floor, she instinctively understood that this man was her master. *Is that how it is?* Banagher had some doubts as he wondered how her consciousness entered his mind. There was a girl around 10 years old with blue eyes shown right in front of him —

Light. A savage and violent light that radiated through space.

That kind of light that appeared on the all-view monitor was a light of explosion. "Ple Three is killed!" Banagher and Marida were inside the cockpit as they heard the girl call out.

"Master's dead too. He's dead!"

"What should we do?"

"Calm down. There're still enemies left on the battlefield. We have to purge the Federation. We have to eliminate all of master's enemies, whether it's the "Gundam" or Haman!"

The 4th sister called out, and the sisters regained some calmness . The black mobile suits became their limbs, and the binders that were extended out from their shoulders made them look like machines with wings. The sisters lined up and attacked the enemy, understanding what to do. *We just needed to use the funnels to get rid of anything that gives any antagonistic intent. We're not complete, but we can do it. We're created to do it.*

But what exactly is the enemy? Marida thought as she joined the line unconditionally. *Is it something that's hurting master? Is it*

something master deems to be a target? We were trained all this while to protect master, we take quite a few painful injections nowadays, our minds are stuffed with so much knowledge they can blow up, but I can endure it all for the sake of master. My sister with the same faces and abilities are also following master, like how they were pursuing that light when they were born. Service and dedication were the only values we were taught.

But that master who taught us this isn't around. Do we still have to fight when master's not around? Even though we're all designed to be in the same form, all of us are different. The 6th sister would call herself 'this me', while I call myself 'I'. We're all multiplied from a single source, and we received similar training, but we're different individuals. I heard from the doctor before that this is an individual difference. I heard of this term ' soul' before. Everyone's different, and there will be as many different things as there are people. Are our souls the same? Are souls lonely? Even though we have so many people, I still feel very lonely…

Nobody said anything about this, but there was this feeling. They could not hide the wavering of their minds caused by the loss of their master, this core of their lives. Their mobile suits movements were obviously slow, and they would be massacred if they gathered together. The 12th sister broke the rule for the first time as she was the only one to leave the line a little.

In an instant, a beam of light ripped through space, and the black mobile suits were devoured. The mobile suit was ripped apart by the mega particles that scattered and came in from all directions, and she was thrown out into space.

The all-view monitor was swtiched off, and the cockpit, which was covered in darkness, spun around. It was severed; Marida's bond with the sisters and the machines were forcefully severed as everything else was returned to Heaven. She desperately reached out her hand, searching for greenery amidst the darkness. The weakly flickering alert image caused the hand that was grabbing emptiness to appear—

Light. Lewd, vulgar and contemptible neon lights.

There were several bars lined up along a street on this secluded area. The scene changed to a corner of a bustling street that had corroded vomit and stenches of pee. A middle-aged woman with her back facing the neon lights frowned as she said, "This kid stinks!"

"She's just a kid. It's impossible to sell her like this."

"There are customers who like such things, right? She was seated in an escape pod when I picked her up. It seems that she went completely bonkers here. Her mind's all blank, so she'll listen to anything no matter what!"

The woman looked at the girl's face. There was an irritating smell of perfume moving up the girl's nose, and though she thought that this was basically the smell of a toilet air freshener, her body and mind would not react. The woman clicked her tongues as she hummed, nudged the girl by the head and pushed her into the shop. The girl's swaying footsteps stepped right into

the water puddles, and the neon lights reflected off the water surfaces shook as well.

Banagher and Marida were staring at the girl's face there. That dirty face with a head full of unkempt long hair was facing them. The 12th position underaged girl remained defenseless as her body remained there, looking up at a certain spot in the sky…

"So then."

The man received some money from the woman and hurriedly left. *The man who pulled me out from the darkness of the cockpit, the man who should me my new master is leaving.* Master; the girl pursued after the man as she gave a voice from her throat. "I'm your master from today on!" The woman grabbed the girl by the shoulder and exhaled a smelly fat smell.

Master. She would not be able to survive without her master, the one thing bonding her to this world. But as the girl was about to step into that world, her master would change every night. Her new mission was to accept any requests the master made and satisfy them. They would be rotten slugs licking all over her, and after everything ended, the girl would feel that she was garbage. The dirty water accumulated within her, and her sense of existence would gradually vanish. Finally, what was left was the bag of dirty water under the raw skin that accumulated.

However, I had to listen to master. That's because I'm alone. There's no difference between getting into a mobile suit to fight and serving different masters every day as I can't let my own will interfere. In the end , artificially created beings don't need wills. I should have just followed

orders to serve and dedicate like my sisters, and I wouldn't be left behind as a result.

The cheap bed let out a creaking sound, and the smelly stench blew all over her face. She endured the backlash from the lone intention she accidentally had, and at this moment, the hollow blue eyes were looking at the ceiling that was swaying up and down. The rotten smell felt like it was corroding her body, and it became her smell—

Light. Icy cold light that represented loss.

She could see the white ceiling. It was the ceiling of a treatment room that looked much poorer and dirtier than a Neo Zeon medical facility. The bald man in white clothes mused with a tired voice, "She's still so young…"

The silver washbasin that was placed beside the bed vaguely reflected her face. The 12th sister body that became 15 years old was lying on the bed, and she blankly opened her numb and dazed yes. Her expression suddenly tensed up, and her hand that searched for the thing under the lower abdomen froze.

It was gone. It was stolen. Something that grew under the body, that certain thing that was becoming bigger bit by bit was taken away. The girl did not know what it was, but she understood that something very important was already…

The man who looked like a doctor walked out from the curtain, and she could see the treatment table that had apparatus to fix the

legs down. The syringes, scissors and a hook shaped rod were left on the table without much thought. *Did that thing pull it out?* The moment she made that guess, she was prompted by fear as she nearly screamed, and her body nearly rolled off the bed and landed on the floor. She could not stop shuddering, and what rose up within her was a feeling a disgust. Someone secretly dug out something from her body, and the unforgettable pain spread through her body.

What exactly, have I lost? The words were formed within her chest, but she was unable to convert them into words, and she was carried out of the treatment room by the doctor. "You didn't hurt the product, did you?" the middle aged woman waiting in the standby room was smoking there "No, but…" the woman did not really look at the doctor who answered "Then, let's go back." as she merely turned behind. The 12th sister stopped in her tracks as she stared at the woman.

Her body felt weird ever since a while ago. She felt something around her stomach forming, and her periods stopped as well. *What is it? I hope I can put it back if I can. That's a part of me, and it's definitely something important.* The girl turned her voice that was not released into a stare, and the middle-aged woman momentarily changed expressions as she looked over, "Let's go. What are you doing!" The woman commanded her as she pulled the girl, and the girl could only stutter over.

"THAT HEAVY STONE WAS TAKEN AWAY, RIGHT? SO COME HERE, YOU!!"

The woman screamed hoarsely as she tried to pull the girl's body as she remained rooted to the floor. *No, that's not a huge stone.* The voice in her chest never materialized itself in the end as she was pulled onto a dilapidated street. She was pulled onto an electric car that was parked beside the street, and the car moved towards the bustling street the shop was. The usual and mundane street scenes passed by outside the window, and the complex looks people had passed by. The bicycles were gathered together, the children were running around on the streets, a young mother was pushing a baby car, a baby was crying there…

These scenes passed by in a blur, wet manner, and icy cold water flowed down her cheeks. Tears. She never cried when she lost her master and her sisters. *She didn't bear a child willingly.* Banagher continued to feel them flow down the blue hollows as he thought. *However, whether I was willing or not, it was still a 'light'.* Marida's thoughts answered. A 'light' was born within an artificial being's body, and it was much more dazzling than any light she had seen till this point. It could have been a 'light' that could light this dull, dark and cold world.

That thought can be considered the selfishness of a mother. The two thoughts continued to merge with each other as they toyed with each other *That may be true, but I still want to rely on this 'light'. That' s because souls' are lonely…* and tears continued to roll down the girl 's cheeks as she touched the lower abdomen where there was no heat left. Her teary face was reflected off the car window, and the wet reflected image disintegrated—

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU! BARGING INTO OUR SHOP LIKE THAT!"

"SHUT UP! YOU OLD HAG! YOU'RE TREATING A BRAT AS A THING HERE! IF YOU DON'T MOVE ASIDE, I'LL WRECK THIS SHOP!"

Someone roared. The girl raised her lazy body and she sat up and looked at the metal door on the dirty wall. The high decibel sounds rattled through the door, and the shocked mice hurriedly scampered away.

The bottle that was used to store urine was toppled onto the floor, and the stains spread on the floor as a result. *I'll be beaten if I don't hurry up and clean up.* The girl thought, but she had no strength to get off the bed. *How long has it been since that unlicensed doctor pulled that stone out of my stomach?* That girl's body was wrecked ever since then, and she could only remain in this underground room and lie around like a slob. *As I expected, that was my other half.* The 12th sister stared at her skinny hand that was like an old person, giving an unconcerned look as she heard the noise outside. This bag where the other half of the body was ripped off could not even contain the dirty water anymore. The body that inhaled the damp air of the underground room was just a pile of sodden residue.

GATAK. The sound that shook the room rang, and the metal door was opened. The light from the corridor shone into the room, and the girl could not help but use her hands to cover her face. It

was a light that was overly bright to her eyes as she had never seen the sun for several days. A man was standing there with his back facing the light. The man was about to step into the room, but hesitated as he used his hand to cover his nose, and the urine bottle the mice toppled was lying there. The man looked at the girl and said “it’s her.”, while another hulking figure appeared there.

That person never showed any signs of disgust with regards to the puddles at his feet and the stench that filled the room as he gradually approached the girl. *Is this man tonight’s master?* The girl understood this, and her body moved on her own as she stood on the icy cold floor. As the sweaty and stained clothes slid off, the girl faced them while being completely naked. Perhaps those figures gasped because of the bruises all over her body? The girl was slightly relaxed as she knew that this master did not seem to have that kind of interest. Her current situation was such that she probably would not be able to finish those bondage or beaten missions…

“HOLD ON A MOMENT! THERE’S A SCARY BIG BROTHER WATCHING OVER THIS SHOP! GET AWAY FROM THAT GIRL RIGHT NOW!”

The woman screamed outside the room. The man silently picked up the towel beside the bed and draped over gently over the girl.

“I’m taking this girl away.” This voice echoed through the room , and the face that was covered in thick sturdy beard entered the girl’s gaze.

"This girl's our military's property. Thank you for taking care of her."

The infuriated face that was of stark contrast to the deep, calm voice filled the man's face. "WHAT'S WITH THE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ARMY? ARE YOU THE DEFEATED SOLDIERS OF ZEON? I'LL CALL THE COPS THEN…" the woman said that, and the man's voice interrupted, "Try it if you dare." and the grip of the handgun in the man's clutches was shaking in front of the girl.

"I'm very angry now. It doesn't matter whether it's the police or the mafia here; I can kill a hundred of them in my state of mind right now. Don't piss me off."

The other man pulled the woman, who shut up and retreated back, onto the floor, and screams and growls gradually faded away. The girl did not mind the noises as she walked towards the bearded man in the room. The towel draped over her body slid off, and the skinny girl stepped on it. As the girl reached her hand out, intending to touch the face's bearded face, the man seemed to force out the words "That's enough" as he used his wide hands to grab the girl's arms.

"You don't have to do such things anymore. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry…"

The face with the light behind looked down, and the eyes of the man that were holding onto the girl's arms tightly showed a slightly glowing thing. *Why is this man apologizing? And why is he crying?* The doubts that passed through the girl's mind was merged together with the heat that resonance, and her matching

blue hollows continued to stare at the man's face. The girl had been hugged by many masters before, but no one held her arms so forcefully and yet so gently.

However, the girl could recognize this warmth. A long time ago , a hand reached out to her from the water surface. The warmth of the human hand she touched when she was pulled out from the capsule was about the same as this so as this hand. The girl focused all her consciousness on the thick and hard hand of the man. Warmth flowed out from there, and as she felt the cells within her shaking, the girl looked up at the man's eyes. The slightly wet man's eyes reflected her black and dirty face. *Who are you?* The girl tried to ask.

I'm me. The her present in the eyes answered. *You're not the 12th sister, but a one and only existence granted the name of Marida Cruz. You have a real master, so you must live for master. Don't live on because you're created this way, but give your all to serve your master.*

This warmth is the real 'light', the one and only 'light' that reached into this darkness. Don't let go of this 'light'. Go do what master hopes for you to do, fight master's enemies until this body of yours get burned one day, and all your sins and guilt return to nothingness— Marida's thoughts were calling out within Zinnerman's eyes *That's just a curse on yourself!* Banagher's thoughts interrupted at this point. *That's just a curse you set on yourself. The Captain doesn't want you to do that in the first place.*

I know. You're right. But I said it before, didn't I? Righteousness might not be the only thing that can save humanity… Marida's retorting thoughts merged into the light, surrounding the girl that

was standing blankly in the underground room. The white light covered the entire room, and the girl o opened her arms wide let out tears, and Banagher saw the light transform into heat as it evaporated the tears.

Light. A purifying light that burned all sins and guilt—

This was a sensation that happened within a hundredth of a second.

The mega-particles cackled as they scattered, and the blade of the beam saber was pointed at the cockpit of the 4-winged. Banagher recognized Marida's existence inside the cockpit, got back his physical senses and pushed the control stick down with full intention.

The "NT-D" sign continued to flicker as the machine braked suddenly, and the impacts echoed within the machine. Marida was not moving, and her deep blue eyes were looking at the sky, waiting for the light closing in on her to swallow her. She was waiting for the 'light' that could undo the curse she set on herself, one that would burn the grime inside her body. She was waiting for her battered heart and body to return to nothingness, just like the girl that was lying on the floor of the dim underground room.

Since where is there this kind of redemption? Banagher yelled in his thoughts with all he hand as he tried to make the rioting machine stop. *I understand you, whether dream-wise or illusion-wise. When our thoughts overlapped and resonance in that sensation, I saw your existence. Humans can understand each other—and that is the real 'light'*

. What you want to redeem you is to reveal the possibility that's dormant and release the inner god within you. However, you only looked at your past—

The filling thoughts became a light and was released from the Psycoframe. However, despite slowing down, the "Unicorn Gundam" never slowed down in its moments. The pilot's will clashed with the system, and the machine ended up in a state where it could not control itself as its inertia forced it to rush right at the 4-winged. There was just a few meters left before contact—*I definitely won't allow you to get killed. You wild horse, listen to me!* Banagher exerted all the strength in his body to put the control stick down to the maximum and shouted out with all his emotions,

"STOP IT!!!"

The blade of the beam saber beamed the 4-winged's cockpit hatch, and the Gundarium metals were ripped out as well. At that moment, the beam saber suddenly vanished, and the scorching hot grip was left as it touched the 4-winged's abdomen. The "Unicorn Gundam" followed its momentum as it slammed right into the 4-winged, and the two giants got tangled together as they stopped their movements, clinging onto each other as they floated along with the inertia of the impact in space.

The red phosphorus light quickly faded, and the dual-eye sensors changed back to its original green color. The face cover then slid off, the V-shaped multi-blade antenna became one, and the light disappeared from the "Unicorn" that lost its "Gundam"

form. The helmet attachments were removed, and Banagher bent his body that was practically lying down, puking out the stomach juices that rose up in him.

He took off his helmet, and his back rose up and down as he panted heavily. He coughed a few times, wiped his face that was dirtied by sweat and vomit, and noticed a water droplet, different from sweat, lying beside his eyes. It was not water from his body, but from within his heart. The memories ingrained in the other person's mind released a form of painful heat and created a resonance in his brain, forming a drop of tear on his eyeballs…

What kind of experience was that? Banagher rubbed his eyes and searched through his memories that were just about to start fading from his impressions as he stared at the 4-winged in front of him. The machine had all sorts of short-circuited sparks spurting out from all over, and as the monoeye was switched off, the face of the giant that was lowered showed no signs of the monstrous look it had when it destroyed "Industrial 7". The battered, weary and unsupported mobile suit floated within Banagher's sights, overlapping together with the thoroughly battered naked girl, and the deep blue eyes of the girl that swallowed all filth were giving off cold air, "Miss Marida…" Banagher could not help but call out. The voice should have been heard through the communication channel, but there was no reply.

The cockpit functions might have been destroyed after taking so much damage. The burnt, dented cockpit cover remained as it was. Banagher looked away from the machine that might have took lots of damage, and looked up the moment he vaguely heard some coughing sounds.

(…Only humans, have gods…)

The weak voice rang through the communication channel. Banagher held his breath as he listened to Marida's voices.

(The ideals they want to describe, the power to approach their ideals…even artificial beings have them…)

Banagher recognized these words—he accidentally blurted these words his father said when he faced that chapel. At this moment, what he heard were the words that followed, these words only he should know, and he lost his voice.

Marida knew these words, and just like he understood her, she understood him. Marida was within him, and he was within Marida…

Suddenly, an intense emotion that could not be suppressed rose up Banagher's throat, and he clenched his trembling fists. He understood that she was trembling inside him. The strong-willed spirit that harbored the deep abyss of loss, who would not say that she was hurting even though she was, who would not say that she was suffering even though she was, was trembling. *What should I say to someone who's hurt so deeply? I just feel more distant after entering her heart; how can I face this loneliness and sadness—*

"Ev…even if…you do this because of this, it's still not right. Killing off your means to continue living…it's just too sad…"

The useless words came out, and the helpless tears seeped out as they wet his eyes. Banagher could not say anything. An impulse

he could not control rose up his body, and he became one of the many people who tortured her through violence; he had no right to criticize the world for being unreasonable. Marida suddenly smiled and said, (Righteousness might not be the only thing that can save humanity…)

(However…I feel that it's good that you can say 'even so' like that…)

A feeling of respect came from deep within Marida's thoroughly battered, crushed heart and soul. The voice she eked out crushed Banagher's heart as he mused, "That's enough, don't talk anymore." as he lowered his eyes that were rolling out hot passion in a flowing manner. *You're not an artificial being. You're more human than any human.* This intent reached the "Unicorn"s skeletal frame, and both hands moved on its own as it cuddled the 4-winged machine into its clutches.

The fires of the battle ended, and as both allies and foes vanished in this starry sea, the two mobile suits embracing each other floated around. The "Unicorn" cockpit finally received its allied unit's laser signal, telling Banagher that there was a Federation machine approaching him.

The marker indicating the "Nahel Argama" gradually approached Banagher from behind, but despite the calls the Federation machine started making through the wireless communicator, the "Unicorn" and the 4-winged di not move. The two machines floated around, entrusting themselves to each other with "Palau", covered with dust, lying in the background. The patrolling Federation unit seemed puzzled as it let out burner

flares. The weak light surrounded the two still machines, but it could not prevent the scars from appearing in space.

Part 17

"We lost response from the "Kshatriya". It's taken by the enemy ship."

"The signal from the Psyco Monitor is cut. There's no change in the Laplace Program. The seal's still in the same state."

The operators' voices rang, and Angelo looked around as if he just woke up from a dream before looking back at the main screen.

The white hull could be seen moving to the enemy ship on the zoomed-in visual that was full of noise. It seemed that the " Unicorn" and the "Kshatriya" were left on the rear deck, but the interference of the block noise made it hard to tell. *How long did my consciousness fly off?* Angelo shook his numb head, which was still somewhat numb, as he wiped away the sweat on his forehead, and lifted his head on hearing Frontal's words, "Of course."

"So if we don't move to the targeted coordinates, the program won't move onto the next step even if we activate the NT-D?"

Frontal continued to stare at the screen, and had no other thoughts. The moment the "Unicorn" touched the "Kshatriya", time stood still, and a suffocating feeling that stuffed their chests surrounded the "Rewloola"s bridge. *Did Frontal not experience that kind of inexplicable feeling?* As he thought about that, Angelo saw Zinnerman leave the scene wordlessly, and grabbed his shoulder.

"Where are you going to, Captain?" In response to these words, Zinnerman shot a vicious look at him.

"Prompt action, of course. I'm going to get Marida back."

The shoulder Angelo was touching gave off an electric jolt filled with killing intent, and he inadvertently released his hand. Zinnerman used his glare to force aside the bridge crew out of his way as he stepped on the floor and let his massive body float to the do. "Wait! The pursuit order's not…" Angelo did not have the courage to touch his shoulder as he tried to call the other party, "It' s alright." But Frontal interrupted the words he was going to say.

"We'll have the "Garencieres" take charge of tracking down the enemy ship's whereabouts, but be careful."

The voice that came from below the mask caused Angelo to understand that there was no intent to lead the fleet and pursue them. He looked over at Frontal with a probing expression, and Zinnerman, who turned his face full of restrained killing intent, " Yes." muttered as he left the ship. At this point, the Garencieres had lost its main fighting strength, the "Kshatriya", and had only 3 "Geara Zulus" left as part of its fighting force. Angelo looked at the old ship model that was connected to the side of the "Rewloola " through the monitor, and the captain, who might launch some special assault, could be moving through it. He asked, "Is it okay?" and Frontal used his hand to stroke his chin.

"There's a need to send someone to send the signals from the Psyco Monitor. The "Garencieres" is suited for this job. The coordinates the Laplace Program indicated isn't a place where we can send in a large fleet easily."

Frontal looked up at the input coordinates blinking on the navigation screen, and curled his lips with a self-mocking flair. The coordinates suspected to be where the "Laplace Box" seemed to be an overly dangerous place if they wanted to carry out a military operation here. Perhaps Frontal, who believed that a disguised transport ship could do the job, predicted such a predicament? Even if the release of the "Unicorn" and the reading of its data was just as planned, the capture of the "Kshatriya" by the enemy would be unexpected here. Angeo saw that the masked face showed no expression on the side, and could only look back at the enemy ship that was gradually moving away and put his hand on his heart that had yet to calm down.

Despite the battle that was happening, Marida and Banagher had an intense exchange of senses, and Zinnerman did not hid his killing intent in his eyes as he glared at Angelo. *Have I enjoyed such deep emotions with others that were so intense? No, what I should ask is, will I get this kind of relationship in the future?* Angelo could not find the answer from this red silhouette which seemed to be living in another dimension, and he turned his fleeting stare outside the window, into the vacuum.

Part 18

"The pilot's fine too, right? …I understand. We hope to follow along when we inspect the enemy unit. Please be careful with dealing with it; that's all I have to tell the captain. Over and out."

The communication ended as they moved at a similar relative speed to the waverider, and the hands fastened themselves on the grip on top of the machine. After contacting the "Nahel Argama", Daguza stared at "Palau", which was moving further away from the "Loto"s driver seat. The enemy fleet never did anything, and there were no signs of enemy suits pursuing. "Palau", which had cleared itself from its military functions, appeared on the back surveillance monitor through the thin layer of legoliths.

Amongst the ECOAS729 squad that went off first, the "Loto" managed to make contact with the mothership, and the "Unicorn" safely. Their initial objectives were reached, but to Daguza and the rest who were mentally prepared to die as they charged into " Palau", it felt like they were let off easily in this situation. Banagher Links did not follow the spy's instructions, but boarded the "Unicorn" itself and even took the 4-winged back to the ship as a bonus. *What in the world happened for him to do such things?* Despite being willing to accept all outcomes, it seemed that Conroy himself could not view this objectively. "Things really developed well." There was an abnormal heaviness in his voice.

"That four-winged seemed like it was deliberately left there… let's hope they don't pull a joke on us like putting a bomb in it."

"I don't think that they need to deliberately come up with some tricks since they can sink a ship like the "Nahel Argama" easily, but Banagher might have been released deliberately."

"That means those guys will still come after us, right? Those bastards."

Conroy answered cautiously as he pointed the cursor of the rear surveillance monitor to the southernmost side. Including the dummy ships, there were more than 20 enemy ships that predicted the raid and moved out of the dock. If they wanted to, they could have destroyed the "Nahel Argama" whenever they wanted to. Considering how the enemy left them off, the assumption that Neo Zeon could not analyze the Laplace Program would be correct here . They probably intended to let the "Nahel Argama" and the " Unicorn" go before snatching the "Box" back at the crucial moment.

So we're still being toyed by the enemy, huh? Daguza clenched his left hand that did not have its cast removed yet as he sighed lightly , "However, I don't think this mission was in vain" but Conroy's words surprised him.

"Without the 729 fighting a way out for us, the "Unicorn" wouldn't have the chance to escape."

Despite knowing that the enemy planned for this, Conroy still concluded so with a stiff voice. Nasri's "Loto" had broken communications with them, and they could not retrieve a signal piece of debris. "Of course." Daguza answered with a similar stiff

voice and closed his eyes for a while. From the communication channel, they heard news that three other allied units were missing . One of them was the "Delta Plus" that Ensign Riddhe Marcenas, who 'returned back', rode on."

"…You have to come with us, Nasri."

Daguza muttered and opened his eyes. He saw the hull of the " Nahel Argama" that lost its portside catapult, and there was a ghost-like ship floating on the monitor.

Part 19

Think. The shaking machine interrupted Mineva's sleep, and she woke up.

The narrow cockpit was filled with the sound from the generator, and the walls of the all-view monitor were filled by the CG space. She could not feel any G-force striking her, and she could not see any debris or anything as such. *Have we passed through the shoal space region?* Mineva inspected her body that seemed to have passed out before, and opened the helmet visor, only to blink when she saw the drinking tube that was handed right in front of her.

"Is there any part of your body hurting now?"

Riddhe, who was sitting on the linear seat, gave Mineva a concerned look. The acceleration of the mass driver was overly powerful, and darkness surrounded Mineva's eyes as she experienced the fear of nearly sinking into the seat. *How long have I*

passed out? Mineva took the drinking tube and answered, "I'm fine " as she started drinking. The sensation of her gullet throbbing, a feature zero gravity had, reached her throat, and her blurred consciousness became awake as a result.

"The battle's over. It seems the "Gundam" was taken in by the " Nahel Argama", though I really could see it properly."

Riddhe turned his eyes forward and started drinking from the tube. "We broke off laser communication here. Nobody's pursuing us. They probably think we're dead now."

The self-mocking voice had a sense of burden, one which a soldier knew that he was doing something improper. Mineva did not feel that any spoken apology would have worked as she muttered softly, "…Is that so?" as she looked over at "Palau" which was becoming distant.

The silhouette of "Palau" became smaller than a pinkie's fingertip as it was buried amongst the stars, and it was impossible to distinguish the shape clearly. *What exactly did I betray, and what did I leave behind to come all the way here?* Mineva could not arrange her thoughts in this situation as she harbored restlessness over her ignorance. She stared at the "Palau", and the words "Don't look back" caused her shoulders to jolt.

"We can only move forward, whether it's you, or me…"

Riddhe said, using a tone that seemed to be an attempt to convince himself as he exerted force on the control stick. Mineva did not say anything as she looked back forward.

There was an azure blue light, the size of a tennis ball, sparkling before the endlessly expanding space, floating in space in a middle manner. *That place is the start of everything, a place we have to return to*— Mineva mused in her chest unwittingly, and the "Delta Plus", which transformed into a waverider form, continued to sprint through the eternal darkness. The Earth looked like it was ignoring the disputes that happened in space as it radiated a one and only light, waiting in front of the duo.